

PRRB the Pacific Rim Review of Books

Issue Six, Summer 2007

Publication Mail Agreement Number 4123503

ISSN 1715-3700

\$4.00

SPECIAL EDITION

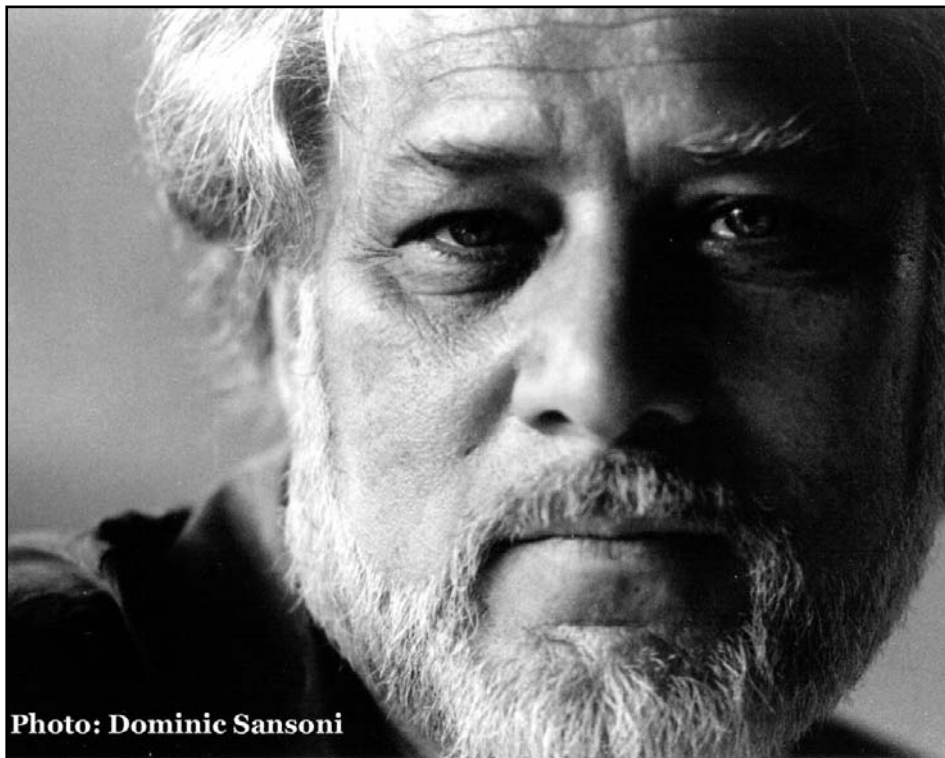


Photo: Dominic Sansoni

**ONDAATJE'S
BIFURCATED
NARRATIVE LINE
LINDA ROGERS READS
DIVISADERO**

**READING ROETHKE
BY MIKE DOYLE**

**HIGH TEA IN MOSUL:
TWO ENGLISHWOMEN
IN WAR-TORN IRAQ
REVIEW BY MICHAEL PLATZER**

**SOUND & FURY
JOSEPH BLAKE ON ORNETTE
COLEMAN, LEE MORGAN AND
THE VILLAGE VANGUARD**

**JIM CHRISTY
ON THE ROAD ENCOUNTERS
WITH ODD BOOKS
IN ODD PLACES**

**NOLA ACCILI ON THE
MYSTERIOUS FEMININE**

**ALLAN BROWN ON
PATRICK FRIESEN'S GRAVITY AND
EARLE BIRNEY'S MUDDY RIVER**

PLUS:

**MARTIN VAN WOUDEBERG ON
BACKWATER MYSTIC BLUES, JOAN DIDION,
SUSAN SONTAG, ELIZABETH WOODS ON
BARBARA GOWDY, LEN GASPARINI ON
MATTERS OF LIFE AND DEATH, PATRICK
CAROLAN ON THE BUDDHA, HILLEL
WRIGHT, KAREN CONNELLY**

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A SPECIAL SUMMER EDITION

Published by Canadabooks Ltd.
Publisher/Editor: Richard Olafson
Managing Editor: Carol Ann Sokoloff
International Editor: Trevor Carolan
Music Editor: Joseph Blake
Medical Editor: Dr. Nicolas Kats
Circulation manager: Bernard Gastel

Cover photo: Photo of Seamus Heaney, courtesy of Faber & Faber

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The PRRB is published three times a year. Back issues are available at \$4.00. A one-year subscription is \$10.00. Please send a cheque payable to the PRRB.

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CONTENTS

FEATURES

- Divisadero* by Michael Ondaatje
reviewed by Linda Rogers page 3
- Straw for the Fire: from the notebooks of Theodore Roethke*
reviewed by Mike Doyle page 3
- Journeys Between Books
essay by Jim Christy page 6
- “Geography of a West Coast Dreamer”: *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim*
by Timothy Gray, reviewed by John Carroll page 12

DEPARTMENTS

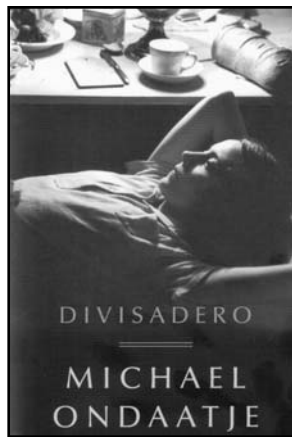
- Sound & Fury: *The Battle of the Five Spot: Ornette Coleman and the New York Jazz Field* by David Lee; *Alive at the Village Vanguard* by Lorraine Singer;
Lee Morgan: His Life, Music and Culture by Tom Perchard
reviewed by Joseph Blake page 8
- Culture Watch: Artscorp Coming to a World Near You
by Carol Ann Sokoloff page 10

REVIEWS

- A Child Again* by Robert Coover
reviewed by Bernard Gastel page 4
- Harvey Pekar: a brief interview
interview by James Eke page 4
- High Tea in Mosul: Two Englishwomen in War-torn Iraq* by Lynne O'Donnell
reviewed by Michael Platzer page 5
- Earth's Crude Gravities* by Patrick Friesen
reviewed by Allan Brown page 9
- “Post-colonial Encounters”: *Mr Ding's Chicken Feet* by Gillian Kendall
reviewed by Ranbir Banwait page 11
- Caliban and the Witch* by Silvia Federici
reviewed by Stephen Snelders page 14
- The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion
reviewed by Linda Rogers page 15
- Backwater Mystic Blues* by Lloyd Ratzlaff
reviewed by Martin Van Woudenberg page 15
- “Moon as Symbol”: *the moon with mars in her arms* by Carolyn Zonailo
reviewed by Nola Accili page 16
- What the Auntys Say* by Sharron Proulx-Turner
reviewed by Morgan Stafford O'Neal page 16
- The Pillowbook of Dr Jazz* by Trevor Carolan
reviewed by Hillel Wright page 17
- The Buddha, Geoff and Me* by Edward Canfor-Dumas
reviewed by Patrick Carolan page 18
- Helpless* by Barbara Gowdy
reviewed by Elizabeth Rhett Woods page 19
- The Sea* by John Banville
reviewed by Linda Rogers page 20
- Japanamerica* by Roland Kelts
reviewed by Todd Shimoda page 20
- Morningstar: A Warrior's Spirit* by Morningstar Mercredi
reviewed by Frances Cabahug page 21
- The Lizard Cage* by Karen Conelly
reviewed by Alexandra Moss page 22
- Beyond the Blue* by Andrea MacPherson
reviewed by Linda Rogers page 23
- Yoga Poems: Lines to Unfold By* by Leza Lowitz
reviewed by Christina Morita Clancy page 24
- Matters of Life and Death* by Bernard Maclaverty
reviewed by Len Gasparini page 25
- One Muddy Hand: Selected Poems* by Earle Birney
reviewed by Allan Brown page 26
- Nota Bene Poems* by Stephen Bett
reviewed by John Tyndall page 27
- The Lives of Others*: a film by Florian Henckel von Donnersmark
reviewed by Mike Doyle page 29
- “Visions and Codes: Two Novels”: *Babylon Babies* by Maurice G. Dantec;
Seven Touches of Music by Zoran Zivkovic
reviewed by Bernard Gastel page 31

DIVISADERO

Linda Rogers



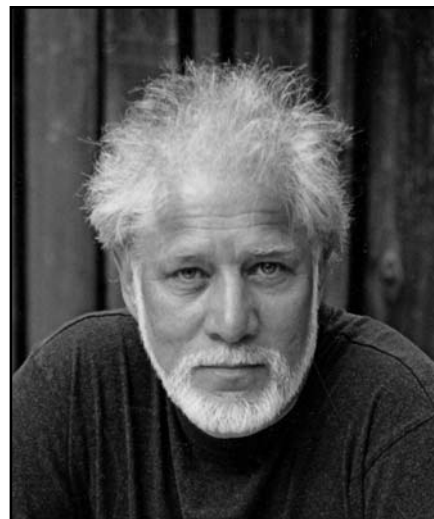
Divisadero
Michael Ondaatje,
McClelland & Stewart,
2007, hardcover \$34.99,
273 pages

In this world of melting ice floes, Michael Ondaatje, the most careful of writers, has risked the very edge of a vanishing waterscape. *Divisadero* is a novel about separation and the possibility of finding grace at the end of a dangerous voyage. This is a tricky business. As the ice separates, Anna, the narrator has one foot on either side of the divide. Will the book split down the middle or will Anna miraculously reconcile its parts. I think this depends on the reader.

The linear reader will have trouble with the shifts in time and tone, with characters who appear and disappear at the caprice of circumstance. Like the interior novels of Joyce or Woolf, *Divisadero* needs to be experienced. The narrative line, tenuous at the very least and as full of incredible coincidence as fiction by Thomas Hardy, is actually a meditation on the various aspects of mercy and change, as incongruous bed partners as many of Ondaatje's unlucky lovers.

Ondaatje is a poet who can't resist symbolic language. One such moment embodies the beauty and frustration of Anna's quest. When her "sister" Claire seeks

shelter with strangers, she is joined in bed by the family dog. "For a while, it was still, and then, wanting more space, it pressed the claws gently, then more firmly, like tuning forks into her back." That is an image that jars until the reader accepts that dogs hear in a different frequency, a range that Claire will need to access in order to hear her own destiny.



Michael Ondaatje

Desiderata might be the title of the sub-text of this picaresque recitation, as desire is the impetus for movement and change when men and women rent by circumstance seek comfort in one another.

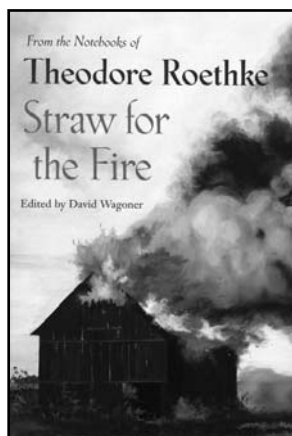
We are never sure of the degrees of separation between children who are raised in the same environment. The novel begins in Petaluma, California, with Anna and Claire, twinned in their nurturing after both lost their mothers at birth and raised by a caring father. They are rent in a moment of violence that involves father, sisters and Coop, an orphaned childhood companion, in an extreme erotic moment. "What is the nature of love?" the writer, transparently asks then sets out to discover the meaning of his question.

More than sisters, Anna and Claire are divided but never separated. Coop, battered by his jealous surrogate father, becomes a gambler, the lingering metaphor. When Coop loses his memory in one of the larger co-incidences of the book, Claire becomes Anna to satisfy her own childhood fantasies and to heal him. No one is pure in their motivations. No one is absolutely corrupt. These are real people whose bottom line is the need to connect physically and spiritually with the elusive truth of themselves.

(continued on page 24)

STRAW FOR THE FIRE

Mike Doyle



Straw for the Fire:
from the Notebooks of
Theodore Roethke,
edited by David
Wagoner. (Copper
Canyon Press, 2006.)

Roethke, an American poet of the first half of the twentieth-century, was a teacher, but first and foremost a poet and a fine one. Back in the 60s and 70s especially, I admired his work, rejoicing in poems such as "Big Wind," "My Papa's Waltz," "The Shape of the Fire," "Elegy for Jane," "The Waking," "Words for the Wind" and "I Knew a Woman." Now an opportunity to look at workbooks, specifically from the last twenty years before his early death at 55. Edited by David Wagoner, a good fellow poet, these notebooks, first published thirty-five years ago, reissued under the aegis of the Lannan Foundation, are culled from 277 notebooks, mostly spiral, filled with fragments of poetry, aphorisms, jokes, memos, random phrases, bits of dialogue, comments on writing and life, poem drafts, quotes, and so on - in other words, extrapolations of the poet's mind, insights into working methods and views of life, "seizing whatever he might from the language, but mulling over and taking soundings of every syllable."

The editor presents this material in 43 sections, arranged "dramatically" (not necessarily chronologically), nothing added, with properly indicated elisions.

Roethke himself roamed back and forth among his notebooks, looking for material to stitch a poem together (Eliot did somewhat the same thing). The titles of various sections in this book are supplied by the editor. For instance, he titles a fragmentary "poem" "My Instant of Forever" then, following Roethke's working methods, puts it together from fragments surviving from 1959-1963. Thus, editorial intervention, but throughout the selection the themes are Roethke's: a love-hate sense of woman; his thrashing-about attempts to escape a despised self; evocations of the greenhouse Eden

of childhood; the ecstasy of glimpsing the One, and his "wars on God"; the final grappling with the approach of his own death.

The chosen material is divided between poetry and prose, with the former slightly more than half. Selection begins with 27 versions, or conglomerations, of poems, composed from material covering several years, often two years, sometimes as much as eight or nine. Take, for example, "She Took My Eyes," dated here 1954-1958, which represents on the one hand Roethke's celebratory sense of women, on the other his attachment, where this area of experience is concerned, to formalist poetry, notably the "Cavalier poets." It begins:

Who'd change the motion in her thighs?
They give such pleasure to old eyes,
I'd have her walk around
All day where ancients gather to
Exchange the news of me and you
And all whose limbs are sound.

The first of two stanzas, this serves to show why Roethke left it in a notebook. As transcribed here, his next move is one line: "She looks as if she had been basted lightly in butter." The material goes on for three more pages, in groups of lines, generally direct, rhyming, pertinent in the same tone, the two most interesting interpolations one-liners out of key with the rest: "The fullness of that pulsing, self-protective, malodorous, carnivorous, lecherous fever"; and: "Men see their Beatrice with a luminous shimmer,

(continued on page 28)



Theodore Roethke

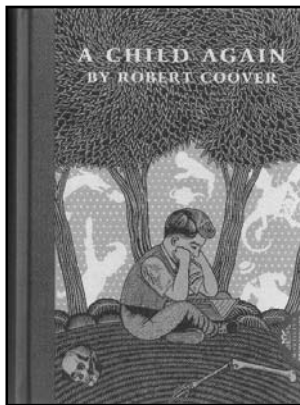
A CHILD AGAIN

Bernard Gastel

Many of us remember books that were read to us or that we read ourselves when, once upon a time, we were children. In those books animals talked and children schemed, the pages slowly turning to reveal the wonder of what happened next. Now, as we grow older, in place of wonder in the stories we read we are given “suspension of disbelief,” as if the only way to enjoy the imaginary is to suspend the rational selves we are in our wakeful hours.

Robert Coover is seventy-five. His first novel *The Origin of the Brunists* won the William Faulkner Award in 1966. Since then his novels have progressed from social realism to fabulism and metafiction. His recent stories often explore children’s tales from new perspectives. Thus, in 2005’s *A Child Again*, there are stories in which the adults of a once-again rat-infested town try to go on with their lives after their children have been lured away by the Piper, where the Stick Man enters a multidimensional world beyond his simple one-line horizon, and where the Prince ponders life after kissing Sleeping Beauty.

But is it possible to be what we once were, or even to read stories as we once read them? We may have lost a necessary innocence. Anyone looking to enter and lose themselves in Coover’s tales will probably instead sense a displacement. It is as if the



A Child Again.
Robert Coover.
McSweeney’s Books, 2005
276 pages plus 15 cards

reader is trying to awkwardly peer over the shoulder of a younger self immersed in the pleasure of following a story.

There is something suspicious about stories like these: they’re shifty, you suspect they’re up to something. They are all surface where you expect depths. This shiftiness can even become a structuring theme of a story. “The Heart Suit” is composed of fifteen cards located in a sleeve on the back cover of the book. It tells of the King of Hearts who has lost his tarts and must find out who has stolen them. But though one card begins the story and another ends it, the reader is encouraged to shuffle the rest so that every time the story is read the characters’ roles change; someone new is guilty of the theft, and someone else must be unjustly hanged in order to bring the story to a close. The shuffling reader is not innocent at all but complicit in how the story unfolds.

Coover is a master stylist, but sometimes such stories can seem a little empty, puzzles and nothing more, houses that are all windows and mirrors. What do you see when you look inside?

The collection’s first story, “Sir John Paper returns to Honah-Lee,” features Puff the magic dragon. Puff is restless, missing his old adventuring friend Jackie Paper. But

(continued on page 13)



Robert Coover

HARVEY PEKAR: A SHORT INTERVIEW

James Eke

Global warming and comic books don’t necessarily seem like two things that mix but for underground comic book writer Harvey Pekar, the two lead to a natural balance — a balance that has him a little concerned.

“Who knows what the future has for us. Sometimes I’m just happy that I was in the right place at the right time with my books.”

Pekar laughs but is quick to add that he’s more than serious about global warming and what it could mean to comic books.

“I’m pessimistic to begin with but with all these things going on like global warming who knows what people will think about comics and books even in the short term. I just hope they keep reading them and are interested in what people like me have to say.”

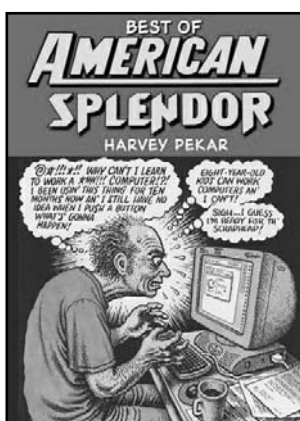
Pekar, the Cleveland, Ohio based underground comic book writer of the autobiographical *American Splendor* — which was also the name of the 2003 film of the same name — was recently in Moncton, NB as part of the Eighth Annual Northrop Frye International Literary Festival.

“They kept me pretty busy. It was a good time,” Pekar said, noting that during the festival which ran April 25-29, he spoke at three schools, sat on a panel and gave a speech.

“It was a good time. Lots of interest in my books and the movie and my time on Letterman.”

Born in 1939, Pekar launched his *American Splendor* comic series, based on his own life and the people he knew in 1976 after influence from his friend, artist Robert Crumb. Crumb was the first artist of many to ink Pekar’s books in which he writes about his daily life, friends, neighbourhood, and his former work as a file clerk at a Veterans Administration hospital.

In the 1980s *American Splendor*’s interest as an underground comic and Pekar’s



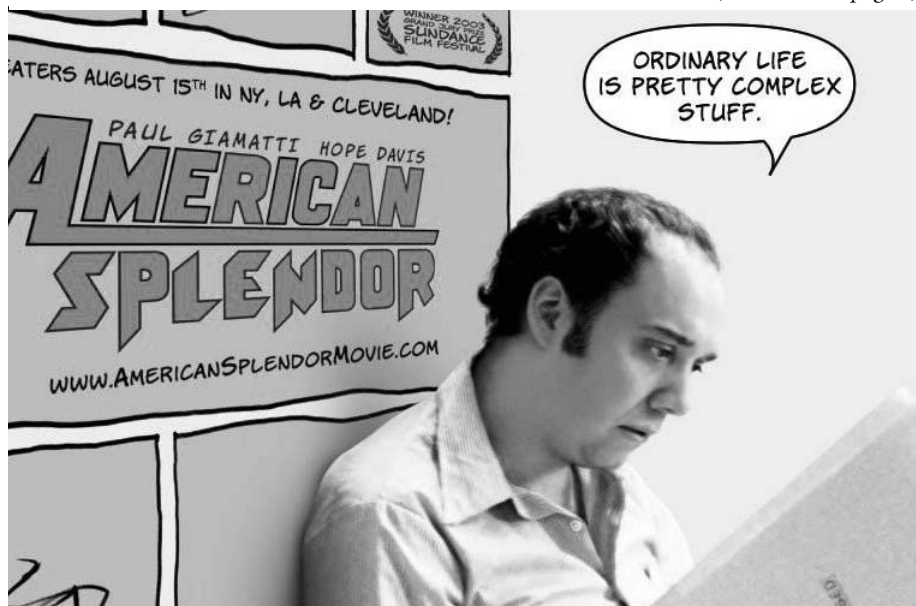
Best of American Splendor
Ballantine Books, 2005
336 pages

own unique view of life led him to a number of appearances on *Late Night with David Letterman* — a run that ended in an on-air argument between Pekar and Letterman — that later became a core scene from the *American Splendor* movie.

The movie has been more than a bit of a godsend for Pekar who admits that since its release there has been far more interest in his books and what he does than ever before but he is quick to point out that while he might have more people interested in what he does, who he is hasn’t changed at all.

“I mean, my lifestyle hasn’t change at all. Well, maybe I’m a little more motivated by money now since I can actually make some — and I’m glad it worked that way because the pension wasn’t going to go all that far. But I don’t really think about the good breaks I’ve had along the way. I still live in the same neighbourhood I’ve always

(continued on page 5)



Paul Giamatti as Harvey Pekar in the film version of *American Splendor*

HIGH TEA IN MOSUL

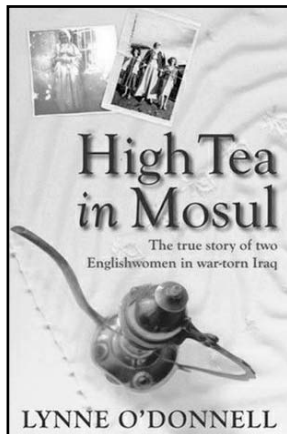
Michael Platzer

To get people, particularly in the UK and USA, to appreciate the folly, chaos, and daily horror of the occupation of Iraq by the coalition forces, tell it through the eyes of two ordinary Englishwomen who had lived for 30 years in Mosul and had their lives turned upside down.

Lynne O'Donnell, an Australian journalist, who is currently based in Hong Kong, has written a poignant tale of two middle-aged women from the North of England who married Iraqis in 1970s and became integrated into life in the city of Mosul during the regime of Saddam Hussein. The observations of life as expatriates, mothers of several children, and wives of professional people are told through direct quotations and private conversations with the author. They describe the happy times as well as the hardships they had to endure during the period of sanctions. The two women relate how they slowly build their homes in a strange land and were gradually accepted by their in-laws and neighbors. They tell of the terror of the bombing by the coalition forces, the nearby explosions, and the massive cracks ripping their houses. The unchecked looting, the kidnapping of relatives, and the dangerous rides on roads are vividly described in a way that makes your heart thump with fear.

One of the women writes in her diary on March 27, 2003: "Bush and Blair have a lot to answer for." She later tells O'Donnell, "Everyone in Iraq knew it would end up like this, with people coming from abroad to exploit the chaos, and people here fighting each other." Paul Bremer, is singled out for making the biggest blunder – dismantling the civil service, along with the police and military and sacking all members of the Ba'ath Party. But even the media popular General Petraeus gets failing marks, for as long as the electricity, water, and telecommunications failed to work and there were no jobs, the American pacification program could not succeed. The hapless Americans were ignorant of the competing ethnic, religious, tribal interests, and the old scores to be settled and were too ready to listen to the opportunists. "The Americans were naïve and too easily manipulated when it came to doling out power to local interests," said the other woman, whose husband had wanted to cooperate with the Americans but was fired instead.

On the other hand, the women had great sympathy for the frightened young American soldiers who were no longer treated as liberators but being shot at by a vari-



*High Tea in Mosul:
Two Englishwomen in
War-torn Iraq.*
Lynne O'Donnell. Cyan
Books, London, 2007

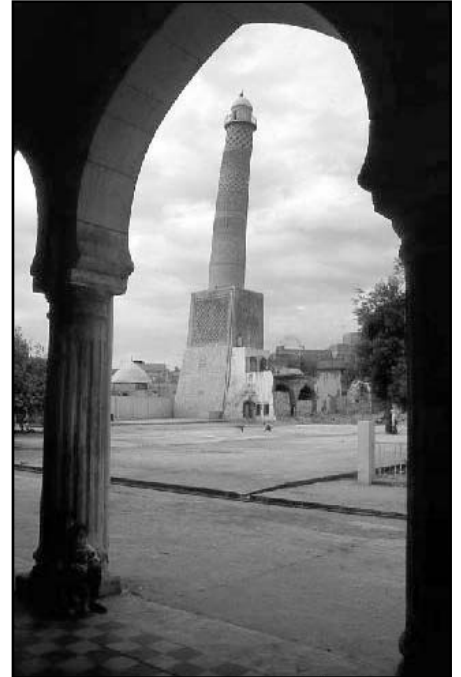
ety of hidden enemies. The GIs had just broken down the door to her house and she "found the soldiers scared, exhausted, confused and angry. They didn't know why they were in a country that they had expected to welcome them unconditionally. But where, it seemed, everyone hated them and wanted them dead." The Americans using sweeping tactics, often based on intelligence that was flimsy or just wrong, turned more and more people against them, and strengthened the support of the insurgents. In the end it became difficult to distinguish ordinary criminals from Islamists who kidnapped or robbed to finance their cause.

As the violence spread out of control and the beheading of Westerners increased, the women had to remain inside their houses for fear of their lives. "If anyone were to ask me do you want Saddam back, I'd say bring him back. At least I could go outside. I didn't have to be afraid of having my head chopped off," the Lancashire lass lamented. In the end, she and her husband flee to the relative security and prosperity of Kurdistan, after their son is threatened with kidnapping. The other couple return to England to restart their lives with two suitcases and very alienated children.

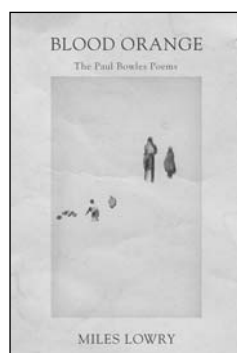
The author concludes her book: "Iraq's civil war will find its own end.... It is impossible to predict how long this process will take. Nor is it likely that it can be forestalled from outside. It must reach its conclusion, through predestined violence and death." The horrible effects on ordinary people, with whom we can easily identify, are due to the intellectual arrogance and self-righteousness of the coalition leaders. "They possessed little understanding of the reality of tyranny, and seemed to genuinely believe that the Iraqi people could just discard the straitjacket of dictatorship and slip immediately into a modern democratic, peaceful and tolerant state."

Lynne O'Donnell has not only written an excellent analytical book about Iraq but has managed to convey the tragedy of the war in a powerful humane manner. She represents one of the best examples of "peace journalism," which seeks to give war a human face.

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



Minaret at Mosul



New from Ekstasis Editions

Blood Orange the Paul Bowles Poems

poems and images by Miles Lowry

Blood Orange is one artist's personal response to another artist. An inveterate traveler, composer and writer, Paul Bowles was a truly remarkable figure whose life and work embodied and responded to the major impulses of the twentieth century. His life would be of considerable interest even if he had not produced a great body of work in literature and music, because of the lives of other writers that intersected his as he relentlessly traveled the globe, moving into the landscapes that would become the unique backdrops for his fiction. His legacy remains a steady influence on others, and *Blood Orange* represents Miles Lowry's ongoing dialogue with his work.

ISBN 1-894800-63-X
978-1-894800-63-1
Poetry
120 Pages
\$21.95
5.5 x 8

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PEKAR (continued from page 4)

been in, hangout with the same friends and the same places — just have a bit of a better financial situation."

And a better financial situation has spelled out to Pekar being able to write about things he has always wanted to but hasn't had the time or ability to focus his attention on.

"Since the movie I've written an autobiography, *The Quitter*, and other things I care about like the Beat Generation, a biography of Lenny Bruce, and a really interesting book on Macedonia and everything that is going on there — you just don't have the time or ability to write that sort of stuff and have people interested in it when you are self publishing maybe a book every year."

Pekar says he has seen a lot of change in comics in the 30 years since he started and says he has a little advice to any young writers who want to crack into the writing business.

"Get published as much as you can. Don't worry about making money. Maybe it won't work out for you as well as it has for me over time but just write and get it out there because it won't do anyone any good if you write stuff and put it in the drawer. That won't help you out at all," Pekar said. "And I'm serious about the global warming thing."

James Eke is the author of the novel Falling Backwards. He is a member of the Armed forces and currently stationed in New Brunswick, awaiting orders.

JOURNEYS BETWEEN BOOKS

Jim Christy

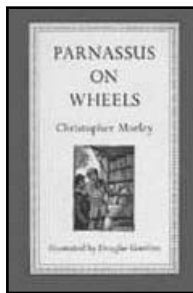
I will soon have to pack for a trip to Vietnam and I've begun to worry about what to take along as reading matter. So what's the big deal? you might think; just throw a couple of paperbacks into your bag and forget about it. And that is what I will wind up doing. But, you see, I may be staying awhile, poking around in the backcountry and it is, therefore, necessary to travel light yet it is also necessary for me to have my daily reading fix. Therein lies the dilemma. I can't bring along some of the great books I've always wanted to read, or two I might be tempted to take a chance on at the airport bookstore or even a pair of old favourites; these either weigh too much or are too important to leave along the way.



Christopher Morley

But it is also true that should I pack enough reading matter I will miss out on the thrill of the search. Although I can read a little bit in three languages other than English, it is only a little bit and even that takes more effort than I may wish to expend while relaxing in a hammock by the light of the moon or, more likely, by the dim bulb hanging from the ceiling while flopped on a spavined mattress in a rundown hotel in some backwater in East Africa or Vietnam.

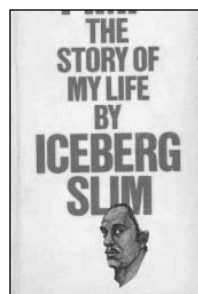
It was just the other day, opening a box that had been forgotten in the garage for years, opening one of the books inside, that I thought of writing down these notes on reading in foreign locales. It was *Parnassus on Wheels* by Christopher Morley. Inside the book, between pages 40 and 41— (“But I'm afraid it is rather easy to follow a craft as unusual as Parnassus.”)— was a receipt for its purchase, nearly twenty-five years ago in Addis Ababa. I only vaguely remember being in Addis Ababa but I remember reading the book and even more, I remember buying the book; it was on a shelf in shop where they sold bolts of cloth and made suits. I was desperate for something to read in English. It would be two days before I was in London. I had a hard time convincing them that I wanted the thin hardback with the raggedy cover and not a spiffy four-button suit like the one that was on the mannequin, a get-up that would make me look like a wild and crazy delegate to a convention of minor Party officials in Albany, circa 1952.



But what was it doing in Addis, this strange volume about a man who drives a book wagon through New England?

From then on, despite worrying and second guessing, I have never started out on any trip with more than two books: one for the sky and one to read while I get oriented or recover from jet lag. Had I been always prepared I would have missed all those encounters with hotel managers, junk store owners, and the proprietors of dress shops in many countries. They seem to be the ones who have the English-language books.

I recall finding an Ernest Haycox novel in Belgrade and reading it in a coffee shop near the main commercial intersection while beyond the dirty windows, a balletic traffic cop entertained the citizens of that dreary city. The appeal of this kind of thing is lost on my world-travelling friend, Kevin Brown, a voracious reader who has been everywhere and always lugs a hundred pounds of books with him. “I don't want to take a chance,” he says. There are some people one goes to the ball game with or has drinks with or, I suppose, goes skeet shooting with but Kevin Brown is a guy I go to Guatemala with. He calls up every other year, “Want to go to Guatemala?” He brings a hundred pounds of books, good ones, but I never get to read one because then I'd have to carry it. Fortunately for me there are several places where one can purchase good English books in Antiqua but a few years ago I found an entire store filled with English books in the unlikely town of Quetzaltenango. There I purchased Flaubert's Dictionary of Received Wisdom, among others.



It is strange to think that there is no English language bookstore in Oaxaca, Mexico. There is a lending library with a hefty fee and a great art library where you may sit and study books in all languages. but if you want a book to take home and read you have to go to a stationery store just off the zocalo. There is a great shop in Florence that not only sells English books but hip English books, stuff I wish I could find in Vancouver. The complete works, for instance, of Alexander Trocchi and Edward Beck, a.k.a Iceberg Slim.

But usually there are no bookstores. In Mexican beach towns the best places to find English language books, for reasons I can't fathom, are boutiques for women. They often have paperbacks on a shelf with the thongs and halter tops. You have to take what you can get even when you know you are not going to be happy. But, then, the unlikely may happen; you're liable to take a book out of desperation and wind up making a great discovery. Last winter in Puerto Escondido, after suffering through a James Patterson novel and, much worse, one by James Lee Burke, featuring his pompous hero Robicheux, I was rewarded with a thick novel of the early days of Coney Island, *Dreamland*, by Kevin Baker. I never would have read this book had I noticed it in Canada. Nor Frank Deford's *Love and Infamy*. The great discovery of the winter, great because it was not a popular novel, thriller, mystery or science fiction but non-fiction and a bit of esoteria to boot was *Suits Me*, the biography of Billie Tipton, a female piano player who spent her life working clubs in the U.S. passing as a man.



Eddie Constantine

Canadians make up the majority of visitors to Puerto but this doesn't mean you will find many Canadian books, and if you do, they will be by Atwood or Richler. I was, therefore, shocked to find Bonnie Bowman's *Skin*, winner of the 1999, 3-Day Novel Award. But I had already read it.

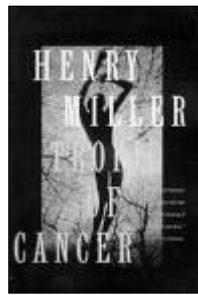
My greatest discovery other than Hans Zinnser's immortal *Rats, Lice and History*, unearthed in a pub in Nuuk, Greenland, was all five novels written by Eddie Constantine. This strange individual, a Greek American lounge singer, fled the Mob, was taken up Edith Piaf in Paris and eventually played gangsters in the movies, most notably in *Alphaville* and *The Long Good Friday*. He had a great crater face. All this I knew but was unaware that he wrote novels. There must be others who've read all five novels written by Eddie Constantine but I've never met any of them. I know there is one such because he or she left them for me to find, one after another in one town after another in Mexico.

Discoveries such as this are rare. It is disheartening to acknowledge what most people read but never more so, for me anyway, than when I'm on a trip. The same thrill-less thrillers, lame science fiction and depressing romance novels. At least I assume they're depressing. I must admit to getting a kick out of knowing those L.L. Bean-ers and Tilley-types, oooh and aaahing over the ancient city of Tikal and making pronouncements about the proud Mayan builders (or, rather, the drugged-out oligarchy who put the slaves to work) have Nora Loft in their knapsacks.

One lives in hope, despite past experience, of great and exotic reading discoveries to come. Maybe a Francis Carco novel in Ho Chi Minh City.

It's been five years since I made that first journey to Vietnam, and just three days since I returned from my fourth trip. There are plenty of books to be had in Vietnam in English though usually not the kind I want to read.

In Saigon and other larger towns, like Nah Trang, though not so much in Hanoi, there are street vendors, usually female, some very young, who make the rounds of tourist restaurants carrying towers of trade-size paperbacks. Each vendor used to have the same stock of twenty because each book was a descendant of the original score.



Some entrepreneur in the early days of the century came into possession of twenty books in English, reproduced the text of the originals and scanned the covers. Five years ago the big sellers were the still popular *Mr Nice*, *Papillon* which is still around but rarely sells and *On the Road* which is no more to be seen. I came across an oddity in connection to the latter title. The text was photostated from an American version of the book but the cover was scanned from a British edition. I sent it to a friend in Ottawa, a collector of Kerouaciana. You can always and immediately recognize a British edition of a work of Americana because the covers always lack verisimilitude. In the case of this *On the Road* edition, the car wasn't manufactured until eleven years after the events portrayed at the close of the novel. When it comes to noirish stories English designers never have a clue, the tough guy private eye always looks like a green grocer and the moll wears flats.

The days of Henri Charriere and Jack Kerouac are passed. English language books in Vietnam have gone middle class with vendors featuring the likes of *Brigit Jones' Diary*, *The Life of Pi*, and anything by Paul Coehlo or Zazie Smith, stories

assured not to upset or arouse the Lonely Planet crowd, sort of like the movies they show on airplanes.

Alternatives hardly exist or I didn't think they did until this last trip when I made an incredible discovery that I'll get to later.

There is a store in the tourist area of Saigon's District One whose owner gathers up books left behind in hotels. Evidently the typical English-speaking tourist favours works by Tom Clancey or Jonathan Kellerman. I was however able to find *Tropic of Cancer* this trip. I hadn't read it for twenty years and forty years, and it was, the third time, even better. Everything everybody criticizes Miller for, his formlessness, his digressions, his ranting, just endear the man to me. I also read another Allen Furst, they're all the same and all good. The only author I discovered on this trip to Vietnam was Robert Moss, his gargantuan thriller *Carnival of Spies*. It's what this kind of thing should be: engrossing without insulting one's intelligence. "This kind of thing" I wrote reflexively. How come "engrossing" and "page turner", and the like, are accolades for popular fiction but not for "serious" literature? Simple: if it's engrossing, it can't be serious. That's the rule. One that evidently was not on the books so to speak when Dostoevski and Tolstoy, Defoe and Dickens, and their ilk, were at work.

In Hoi An, I found a mouldy paperback copy of a book by Pierre Boule, who wrote *Bridge Over the River Kwai* and *Planet of the Apes*. It bore the distinctly less interesting title: *Sacrilege in Malaya*, and concerned the goings on at a rubber plantation. It was terrible, probably the translation, but I'd gotten it because the baffled efficiency expert sent to the plantation from France bore the name Badoux, he being a spoof of Charles Bedaux, about whom I once wrote a book. It was a mean take on a great man. Boule waited until the original had been dead eighteen years before bringing out his book; long enough that he could be sure Bedaux wasn't coming back to kick his ass all the way back to Malaysia.

I was at a small beach town in Vietnam and on a table under a pavilion was a copy of Vassily Grossman's war reportage. There was no one around. No one in a hammock or on the beach. I waited. I took a walk. An hour passed and no one had come to claim the book. Well, I thought, it's been left behind, therefore...but just as I was about to grab the thick volume, a young woman hove into view, headed straight toward Grossman and snatched him up. She was perhaps thirty years old, dark-haired and darkly tanned, very attractive and dressed in a towel. Later that day I saw her with her boyfriend; they were both drinking fruit shakes and reading, she the Grossman and he an even thicker volume: one of the Harry Potter's. How could she be with a guy like that?

Discovering English non-fiction is unusual in those parts, seeing someone reading it more unusual still, but there is a plethora of it compared to poetry. I've entertained fantasies of coming upon Tu Fu in Tiajuana, Li Po in Luang Prabang or Villon in Valparaiso but the closest I'd ever come was nearly twenty years ago in Macau when I found a Portuguese and English selection of lyrics by Tom Waits illustrated with photographs I'd never seen before and haven't seen since. Much later I had an occasion to speak with Mr. Waits and asked him if he was aware of this book. He wasn't and wanted details, he sounded aghast and ready to call his lawyer.

Then three years ago whom should I happen to aspy in a Kuala Lumpur junkshop but Robert Desnos. Well not Robert himself, you understand, because the Nazis took care of him at that concentration camp in 1945. This was another bootleg production, words in French and English and purloined drawings by his friend, the nearly forgotten artist, one of the original surrealists and one of the very few who lead a life that in anyway corresponded with the ideals of surrealism: Geroges Malkine. Forget the Petrona Towers, Desnos made my day in Kuala Lumpur. As a matter of fact,



Robert Desnos

he filled the rest of that day and part of the next. A couple hours after I came across the book, I went to the airport to catch a flight to Saigon. The travel agent had told me that a new law was in effect which permitted me to obtain my visa for Vietnam at my point of arrival. Trusting him, I boarded the plane only to be detained at airport security in Saigon. They put me in a little room and held me for four hours. All the time I read Desnos, over and over. Then I was escorted by guard to a plane that returned me to Kuala Lumpur. There, officials demanded I pay for the flight from Vietnam back to Malaysia. I demurred, saying that I didn't want to be in Kuala Lumpur in the first place. So into detention I went, this time to a real cell with bars where again I read Robert Desnos, over and over. Finally, several hours later, they let me go and announced I was banned from entering Malaysia for ninety days. I couldn't resist a riposte: "Could you make that 120?"

There is no problem getting English language books in Singapore, the great

majority of them about business and finance. Some look quite interesting, like the paperback I bought, but haven't yet read, about the roots of some of the worlds' greatest private fortunes.

But in Southeast Asia, Cambodia is the place to go for interesting books in English, or French. Yes, I know, I hear you world travelers hollering: "You're wrong, it's Thailand!"

I admit I have a prejudice about Thailand, a country with serious problems that serves as a playground for sex tourists, child abusers, young party animals and trendoids from the West. One can go there and entertain the illusion of having a S.E. Asia experience. It's Cambodia-light, although, ironically, it's the most dangerous country in the area. Or, it's going to be. The bombings in the South are headed north, and I don't want to be in a bookstore in Bangkok when things go BOOM!

There is a great second floor bookstore in Phnom Penh that specializes in bootleg copies of books about Cambodia; it has everything concerning the country's history, politics, culture and daily life. In an entirely different part of town, set among elegant restaurants and dress shops, is a secondhand bookstore where one can always depend on finding something good to read and perhaps make a special discovery. On my last trip, I came across a biography of that French naval officer and eccentric whose name in the early days of the last century was synonymous with exotica: Pierre Loti. He'd been in Cambodia. It was written by Lesley Blanch who was the first wife of Romain Gary. Ms. Blanch is still alive in Menton, France, 104 years old and writing her memoirs.

My most rewarding find during recent travels in Cambodia was the original English edition of *August*, the second volume of the Wanderers trilogy by Knut Hamsun, the Norwegian Nobel Prize winner, and one of the great writers of the modern age.

As for that great discovery I mentioned earlier, it occurred in a city that I will not identify because, quite frankly, I want the contents for myself. Yes, "the contents," because it is one of those finds one only dares dream about and, were the dream to come true, one would take drastic financial measures. I'd seen the shop before. It is in a part of that town where one sees no other westerners. A shop with some of its wares displayed on the sidewalk, in this case what used to be called comic books but are now known as graphic novels. It's a tradition in many countries of the world, one that had its roots in the illiterate or semi-literate past but which has held on in places like Vietnam where the literacy rate is now 97%. Anyway, I was curious about the front room and entered the shop to find floor to ceiling shelves of Vietnamese books. At the rear of the room was a door. I asked the proprietor what was behind the door. He opened it for me. The room contained, floor to ceiling, books in English, French and Russian, the majority of them art books. Most of the books seem to come from collections secured during the French occupation, the American war and sent directly from the former Soviet Union. Some of the American books, like the selection of Jack London stories that I bought, have the name and rank of the former owner printed on the inside cover page. I bought a first edition of Ernest Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not*. I also got a richly illustrated study of the elephant in Thai life and legend. My immediate reaction, however,



Romaine Gary

was to ask the man what he wanted for the contents of the entire room. But I decided to exercise a little discretion. It is necessary to figure out where I would store the books and what I would do with the ones I wouldn't want to keep. The cost of shipping them back to North America would be prohibitive. The childrens' books in Russian might be valuable. There is also a history of Russian painting, the works of the Hermitage Museum with lavish plates, and books of poster art and sculpture done during the time of the 1917 revolution. Thick volumes on Matisse and Rodin, Rembrandt and Picasso. Several volumes of drawings. *The Larousse Encyclopedia* and the entire Coronation Edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*; I own half a set of the latter, as does my fictional private eye, Gene Castle; we both long for a complete edition.

Oh, yes and there are sets of the collected works of Dumas and Gorky, and, well... never mind. I shall say no more except that we finally agreed on a price of five hundred dollars U.S. for any five hundred books. Like the man said, the books were there when he bought the store fifteen years ago and he hasn't sold one of them since.

My friend Mr. Huu Tu Nuang will let me store them at his home and that way I'll have something to read when I'm in town.

Well that's my big book discovery in a foreign country. You'll have to go and make yours.

Jim Christy is a poet, novelist, essayist, world traveller and raconteur. He has published numerous essays, novels, collections of poetry and has released several Compact Discs of his poetry set to music.

THE BATTLE OF THE FIVE SPOT

Joseph Blake

Ornette Coleman is arguably the most important jazz musician of the last 50 years. His controversial New York debut is the centerpiece of this brief examination of a seminal moment in modern jazz. David Lee, a jazz musician and author-publisher, uses sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theory of artistic fields to explain why Coleman's pivotal performances had such an impact.

After conjuring-up The Five Spot with a highly personal, poetic introductory chapter, Lee establishes Coleman's place in the 1950s jazz world in chapters reflecting upon jazz as high art, black art and white hegemony, and Coleman's rejection of the song form and development of harmolodics.

Chapter three's investigation of Coleman's musical history and the evolution toward atonality in jazz is very strong writing, deep with insights including jazz great George Russell's description of Coleman's harmolodic music.

Russell describes harmolodics as depending "mostly on the overall tonality of the song as a point of departure for melody. By this I don't mean the key the music might be in. His pieces don't really infer key. They could almost be in any key or no key. I mean that the melody and chords of his compositions have an overall sound which Ornette seems to use as a point of departure. This approach liberates the improviser to sing his own song really, without having to meet the deadline of any particular chord."

Chapter four digs even deeper into Coleman's seminal 1959 recording of his composition *Beauty Is A Rare Thing*, describing how members of the band "call, respond, and merge with each other into a collective freedom."

Lee argues that Coleman's free playing proved that "suddenly playing jazz need have nothing to do with the song form- in fact, if improvisation was, as many insisted, the essence of jazz, then it logically followed that to retain the song form- or in some cases, any kind of prearranged structure- could only be an impediment to self-expression."

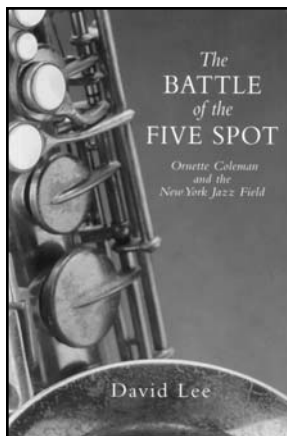
In chapter five Lee introduces Pierre Bourdieu and the concept of field, carving the sociologist's theory down to "taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier."

Positioning jazz in a tension between exclusion and legitimacy, Bourdieu's explanation of cultural capital is defined as "what one *knows* about one's chosen field: The knowledge of the genre's history, the background that enables one to interpret the codes implicit in a work, and perhaps most importantly, the command of the language used by members of the field."

Lee brings these forces into the New York jazz field and the division of social art, bourgeois art, and art for art's sake that make up the jazz field's hierarchy.

In the next chapter he paints a vision of The Five Spot with its salon-like audience of Jack Kerouac, Norman Mailer, James Baldwin and Leonard Bernstein among the crowd of jazz musicians. The musicians' varied reactions to Coleman's New York debut and the response of the writers and critics sets up the title chapter's battle notes and a very interesting comparison of the careers of Coleman and fellow free jazz pioneer, Cecil Taylor. He makes a strong case for Coleman's leadership.

Equally interesting is the description of the Modern Jazz Quartet leader, John Lewis' role in consecrating Ornette's leadership status in the jazz field. Lee pursues this investigation in the next chapter, challenging the accepted jazz evolution with a view based on jazz fields around seminal characters like Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, Jelly Roll Morton, and Wynton Marsalis. He caps his argument with a description of



The Battle of the Five Spot: Ornette Coleman and the New York Jazz Field by David Lee
The Mercury Press
118 pages paperback
\$17.95 Cdn



Ornette Coleman

two worlds of jazz, Marsalis' mainstream and the free jazz field of musicians Cecil Taylor, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, and, of course, Ornette Coleman.

The book's epilogue climaxes with a description of Coleman's long, post-Five Spot career and a lovely review of his band's 2005 performance at Toronto's Massey Hall. That chapter and this book should lead you to 2007's *Sound Grammar*, Coleman's first recording in more than a decade and his first live recording in 20 years. If Lee's little book inspires you to buy that CD, he will have given you a real gift. The book is interesting, but Coleman's recording is a gem.

Two recently published jazz books help complete the picture of the music's century of discovery.

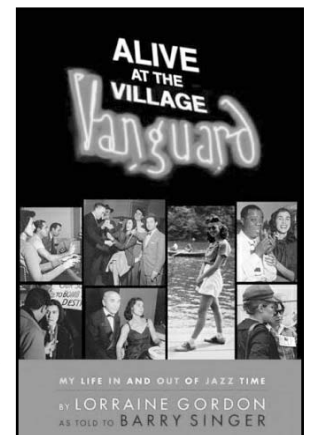
Alive at the Village Vanguard is Lorraine Gordon's autobiography as told to Barry Singer. It's as chatty as a barroom jazz mother could be, sort of talking out of the side of her mouth with a knowing sigh. As a young woman Lorraine was married to Blue Note Records co-founder Alfred Lyon. After a short but jam-packed marriage and unofficial business partnership, she left Lyon to marry Max Gordon, owner of the Village Vanguard and father of her children.

Originally founded in 1935 as a basement venue for Village folkies, poets like Ginsberg and Kerouac, and comedians like Lenny Bruce and Woody Allen, the Vanguard evolved into the world's greatest jazz club. From Sunday jam sessions with Lester Young and Coleman Hawkins, to 1940s club dates by Miles and Monk, to groups like The Bad Plus in the 1990s, the Village Vanguard has been a beacon and a home for great jazz. Dozens of great recordings have been recorded live at the club including acclaimed work by Bill Evans, John Coltrane, and Wynton Marsalis.

In this breezy autobiography, Lorraine Gordon speaks (thru Singer) with a brassy, charming honesty about her life and loves. Before taking over management of the Vanguard when Max died in 1989, Lorraine raised a family while traveling the world. One chapter describes her political work including demonstrations with Barbra Steisand on Park Avenue street corners, another mentions her efforts to help restart the career of her early jazz hero, Jabbo Smith. After a youthful infatuation with early jazz and swing, this self-described Jersey Girl crossed the bridge into New York's jazz scene and into jazz history. From her years helping Lyon develop Blue Note Records into a seminal jazz label to her last two decades as one of the music's strongest and most loved supporters, Gordon's passion for jazz has been her guiding light.

I don't think anyone expected the Vanguard to improve after Max Gordon's death, but Lorraine Gordon has managed to maintain the club's artistic integrity as a nightly site for the development of jazz played at its highest level. Although housed in an odd-shaped basement with few amenities but good sound and its ghosts, the Vanguard continues to thrive. Lorraine Gordon is there near the door every night, like her husband before her, keeping the spirit of the music alive. This book explains why that happened and why that's important. It's an anecdote-laced read with a nice collection of black and white snapshots from a life well lived. The photos give Gordon's spoken narrative a scrapbook-like warmth. It's a wonderful tale.

Lee Morgan: His Life, Music and Culture is British writer Tom Perchard's well-researched, insightful biography of one of jazz music's messengers. In telling Morgan's story, Perchard discusses the role of race and racism, the devastation wrought by addiction, and the damaging economics of America's only indigenous art form, jazz.



Alive at the Village Vanguard by Lorraine Gordon as told to Barry Singer (Hall Leonard 2006)
288 pages, \$39.95



Where to find great jazz in New York: the Village Vanguard

Perchard is a skillful, soulful writer of self-critical honesty. His passionate questions about the forces of community and individualism that formed Lee Morgan's contribution to jazz history and development shed light on the era's art and political ferment while painting a vivid portrait of the musician and his music.

Perchard opens the book with a moving visit to Morgan's north Philadelphia roots, taking the reader to the Morgan home's desolate, gutted, ghetto world. It's a harrowing, claustrophobic vision that Perchard tilts sweetly, and I'd argue heroically to introduce the community at the heart of Lee Morgan's music, using that broader view to better understand the forces that drove a very singular life. Perchard doesn't shy away from the tawdry details of Morgan's addiction and the drug world's violent destructiveness. He condemns bandleaders, label owners, and all the music business mobsters who twist petty cash out of jazz musicians like Morgan. Learning the sordid details of Morgan's seemingly successful career as a jazz musician and hit-making recording artist is one of this book's saddest insights. There are a lot of sad moments in this story, right up to Morgan's gunshot death at the NYC club, Slugs' where he was murdered by his jealous girlfriend-manager.

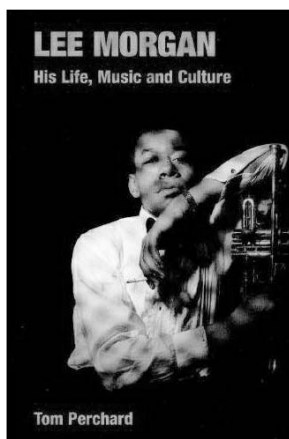
The unrelenting horror of Morgan's life, twice losing his teeth to drug enforcers' beatings, makes the trumpet star's lifelong striving to create jazz in the face of such brutality even sweeter and more moving. Perchard conjures up the camaraderie of monk-like jazz messengers in combat with the wicked world and with each other. Grounded by the blues, the black church, and the neighborhood, these jazz warriors use their instruments to produce singular sounds and daring improvisational music, and the author's poetic writing captures the trumpeter's music in print and makes you want to rush back to Morgan's records.

Perchard's book takes you from teen age prodigy to recording studio machine, from fearless pretty boy to broken junkie. Like the most transcendent blues, Perchard's tale brings Morgan's story through hell on earth to black nationalist consciousness and mentoring in educational institutions like the Jazzmobile project in Harlem where Morgan shared his hard-won wisdom with the next generation. By the 1970s

and his last recording, the musician was experimenting with a bold, expansive studio creation showcasing his young bandmates' complex compositions and the leader's desire for artistic freedom within a more Afrocentric, collective, non-commercial approach to jazz.

Miles Davis and Ornette Coleman are two jazz visionaries who pursued this path, a journey Morgan's music helped blaze. I wish Perchard's book included a discography, but I can find that last recording on my own on the Internet. This book makes me want to hear Lee Morgan's horn again, and that may be Perchard's greatest gift.

For 25 years, Joseph Blake has been Canada's grittiest music writer. A widely read travel correspondent, he lives in Victoria, B.C.



Lee Morgan: His Life, Music and Culture
by Tom Perchard
(Equinox Publishing
2006) 297 pages
hardbound \$?



Lee Morgan

EARTH'S CRUDE GRAVITIES

Allan Brown

“Which I is I?” Theodore Roethke asked in the *Sequence, Sometimes Metaphysical* (“In a Dark Time”), not as a direct query, expecting a direct response; but rather a kind of continuously open conditional statement, hinting toward some answer, series of answers, that will always be a new question.

Patrick Friesen asks/answers the same interrogating statement with his twelfth poetry collection, the well-produced *Earth's Crude Gravities*. The book is divided into three parts: *tourist hotel*, a sampling of his personal and religious concerns; *intersection*, with its more self-conscious writing concerns; and the final *all falls to earth*, fanciful and often explicitly artistic.

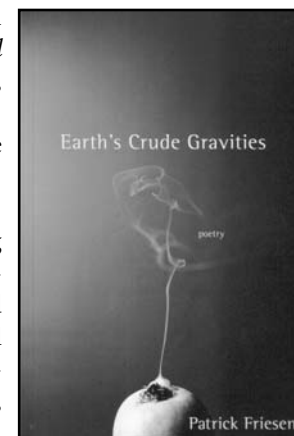
The abrupt, intriguing title derives from Bill Gaston's fourth novel *The Good Body*, the full sentence appearing as a general epigraph for Friesen's volume: “Caught helpless by the demands of heaven, yet helplessly mired in earth's crude gravities.” The human/divine interaction is apt to Friesen's autobiographical concerns here, raised as a Mennonite; but the image also serves as a useful guide to the ongoing exploration of his various encounters and “mediations,” as he termed their prose parallels in his recent collection *Interim: Essays & Mediations* (Hagios Press, 2006).

Though he is certainly capable of many subtleties in the *tourist hotel* pieces, Friesen can when he chooses present a self that startles through mere simplicity, as “you stand at a well and stare down at the face caught in a circle of sky” (“quartet in July”). Probably the most abstract of the religious studies is the minimally titled quasi-catechism “god,” personal and impersonal at once in its careful samplings of “the name.” The two on the road poms that end this section are more explicitly biblical: “vanity,” a gently eccentric reading of Ecclesiastes, and the casually naturalistic “jesus walking to work.”

Several of the poems of *intersection* are directly referential, especially the paradoxical “stone forgets and lasts,” with its documented company of d'Annunzio, Rilke, and especially and in greatest detail, a portrait of James Joyce “in a single room / writing toward ulysses.” The personal birthday poem “fifty-nine years or more” presents other voices with the plain spoken

Frostian “you can walk a straight dirt road” and a deft turn to the generalized “until you keep arriving at the horizon” with its deft echo of Eliot's “to arrive where we started” (*Little Gidding*, V).

The art-themed poems of *all falls to earth* sometimes supply names, such as the popular singers Dinah Washington and Nina Simone in the title piece, or anonymous hints, as with “a voice whistling ‘somewhere’ / in a doorwell” (“when I'm weary I count my blessings”). Something of the painter's art appears here as well. Janice Kulyk Keefer in her thoughtful cover note to the book detects the work and concerns of Cezanne in “is there a knife?” I detect also the mind and movement of the more efflorescent Marc Chagall in this section when an unspecified narrator casually (“of course”) mentions



Earth's Crude Gravities
Patrick Friesen,
Harbour Publishing,
2007



Patrick Friesen

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(continued on page 29)

ARTSCORP COMING TO A WORLD NEAR YOU...

Carol Ann Sokoloff

At a lively dinner in Vancouver last April, Karl Siegler, publisher of Talon Books, was honoured with the Grey Campbell Award from the Book Publishers Association of British Columbia (BPABC). In accepting the award, Siegler naturally reminisced about the early days at Talon, but also spoke on the importance of cultural policy to publishing and the arts in Canada. Soon after becoming involved in Talon, Siegler realized the urgent need for adequate public policy on the arts. This led to his involvement in the founding of groups like the BPABC and the Literary Press Group. Through his and others' efforts, Canada can boast one of the few independent publishing sectors in the world.

The average reader seldom contemplates that a large percentage of English language books published today (and much of the music available as well) are the product of a single multi-national company. This company is the German-based Bertelsmann group. Random House, Doubleday, Knopf and Bantam and the subsidiary imprints of these publishing houses, even the proudly self-titled 'Canadian Publisher', McClelland and Stewart – all are satellites of the Bertelsmann empire. McClelland and Stewart's marketing now takes place out of Random House in New York (and U.S. marketing departments are notorious for influencing editorial decisions.) In connection with the quarter ownership of M.&S. by Random House, Robert Fulford wrote in 2000, "Random House is now the world's largest English-language trade book publisher, and to chart its history over the last 40 years is to follow the two fundamental changes in publishing: the change from more or less private and personally directed firms to major corporations, and the change from national publishing, with each firm operating mainly in one country, to multinational corporations controlling clusters of diversely named publishing imprints around the world."

Indeed, Canada is one of the very few places on the planet where true independent publishing activity still takes place, but it cannot be taken for granted that this will always be the case, without vigilance and outspoken discussion on the part of writers and publishers. Unfortunately the writing is on the wall and changes are clearly afoot.

Our independent publishing sector is the result of carefully constructed public policies, with strict guidelines on Canadian ownership of publishing companies and bookstores, as well as sustained cultural funding for the publication of Canadian literary titles. This support is offered through the Canada Council for the Arts, with a mandate to award funds on the basis of artistic excellence, decided by a jury of peers – all at a legislated arm's length distance from government interference.

I remember some years ago meeting composer Louis Applebaum, one of the creators of the Canada Council, and suggesting to him that the jury system resulted in an ingrown, nepotistic and less than truly vibrant cultural landscape. "It isn't perfect," Applebaum conceded, but suggested how much worse things could be under any other system. "Who would you have making these decisions?" he in turn queried. "Politicians? Bureaucrats? Administrators?" I had to admit the point. It wasn't a perfect system – buddies got rewarded, fringe types marginalized, but it was better than the alternatives.

Back to the present day... At the recent annual general meeting of the BC Book Publishers, Melanie Rutledge, head of the Canada Council's Writing and Publishing program, had come to address the meeting. Decisions on the Council's recent Supplementary Operating Fund Initiative (SOFI) had just been released, and Ms. Rutledge wished to explain the process and results. Publishers receiving the Council's Block Grant program funding had been encouraged to submit applications for wide-ranging projects to be funded under the new initiative. Now the decisions were in the

The average reader seldom contemplates that a large percentage of English language books published today (and much of the music available as well) are the product of a single multi-national company.

Changes are taking place on a bureaucratic level that can have wide-ranging repercussions throughout the cultural community and there has been little public information or dialogue.

mail, and Rutledge explained that supplementary funds had been distributed through a process of identifying and rewarding 'key institutions' from amongst the country's cultural organizations. It seemed to this observer that artistic excellence (the sole criterion for awards according to the Council's governance policy), had taken a backseat to other factors such as size. "The argument for the intrinsic value of culture, art for art's sake, no longer flies," suggested Ms. Rutledge, leaving unspoken the obvious question, "with whom?"

The Supplementary fund itself came into being as a result of a 50 million dollar infusion to the Canada Council by the current government (a drastic reduction from the \$200 million originally promised by the previous government.) When so many Council programs such as the Aid to Artists program and the Publisher's Block Grant program are badly in need of replenishment, why did this funding not flow directly into existing programs? Arts groups have been lobbying about the need to shore up existing programs for many years. Publishers have stressed that funding to the Council's Block Grant program must be increased, in order to maintain current levels of activity. With no adjustment to the funding formula after years of inflation and the addition of new firms, levels of support have fallen significantly.

It would seem obvious that new government dollars should go to replenish existing programs, including more aid to artists and the Block Grants to book publishers or equivalent programs in other disciplines. However, someone had a different idea. The SOFI funding would be available only to organizations receiving ongoing support. These organizations were instructed to apply for funding to improve some part of their current program, and that was all anyone was told. Only much later, when the results were to be released, was it announced that funds would be distributed amongst those arts organizations deemed 'key institutions'.

Melanie Rutledge explained to the publishers that this 'institutional approach' to cultural funding was currently a more acceptable rationale for public spending. "How were the decisions made?" she was asked. "Basically on the size of the organization," was the answer. It seemed clear that even the Canada Council program head was not entirely pleased with the outcome.

This situation raises several disturbing questions: Why was an infusion of badly-needed funds not put into those programs designed to disburse cultural funding fairly and transparently? How will this earmarking of selected organizations on the basis of size affect the cultural landscape and regional disparity concerns? What has become of 'artistic excellence' as the basis for cultural awards? And the most important question of all – how were the decisions made?

Did the government offer these funds with a certain agenda? If so, what about the sacrosanct 'arm's length' governance policy? Now that the decisions have finally been made public, we learn that 'international assessors' were involved in determining the 'international importance' of an organization. Is this not a violation of the principle of 'peer assessment'? Should British, American or other nationals be making decisions about which Canadian arts organizations receive public funding?

Canadian culture, as a whole, has been clearly affected. We now have a two-level system. We have 'key institutions' who have been given extra funding to encourage their growth, while the rest are, in contrast, diminished and disadvantaged. All must compete for sustained funding, based on excellence and performance, but some have received very large infusions of cash to help them achieve these results. The rest have to manage on weak levels of support offered by the basic programs. It seems obvious



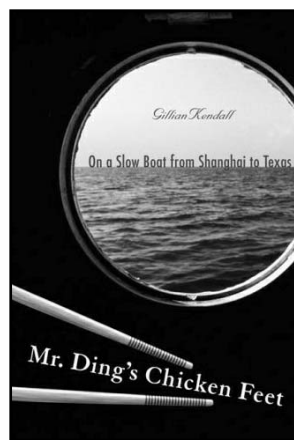
Louis Applebaum, co-author of the Applebaum-Hébert Report on Culture.

Should British, American or other nationals be making decisions about which Canadian arts organizations receive public funding?

(continued on page 11)

POST-COLONIAL ENCOUNTERS

Ranbir Banwait



Mr. Ding's Chicken Feet
Gillian Kendall.
University of
Wisconsin Press
216 pages. \$22.95 US

Gillian Kendall's *Mr. Ding's Chicken Feet: On a Slow Boat from Shanghai to Texas* is, above all, an entertaining read. An account of a graduate student who negotiates with various cultural and social spaces during a six-week sojourn on a ship making its way from China to the U.S., the narrative turns on the liminal zone of encounter. In the case of our protagonist, Gillian reveals an abiding fascination with preserving bodily and private space while translating her encounter with linguistic barriers, masculine ideologies, and cultural differences into a search of self: "I thought about how fast the card game had been, how foreign the chess, how unappealing the death-and-destruction video game. For a long time, it was going to be just me and the ocean." Of course, this passage most clearly demarcates the individual from the collective and the social. But even more than that, Gillian's observation concerns how an experience of otherness re-constitutes the individual self.

Hired to teach English to the crew of Chinese sailors, Gillian—the only female aboard the ship—narrates both her preconceptions about the men and her changing attitudes toward racial and cultural distinctions. Since *Mr. Ding's Chicken Feet* appears to be a typical tale of "West meets East," it's no wonder that the central metaphor is one of gustative function—"Communication had occurred. Everyone knows what it is to feel hungry." Food plays a central role in the text as the social encounters upon the ship are mediated, in part, by divergent understandings of food practices. As the author notes, the chicken feet help to comically establish her friendship with Ding, and "the international word 'Coke,' becomes a basis of establishing cultural differences on the basis of taste in "strong" alcohol. Indeed, the sailors note that since

"Coke-ah [is] too strong," So, too, would be American wine, while the Chinese wine that Gillian drinks is too strong for her.

But the precise nature of these interactions bears further looking into. Most alarmingly, what initially strikes the reader is the number of preconceived racialized assumptions about "the Chinese" that the protagonist brings to her interactions with the men—"it was like being with young, demanding children"; or, "the men all looked the same." On the other hand, Kendall also places the portrait of the misguided but well-meaning "teacher" who ultimately develops a kinship with the Other, against the ever-present but sinister and somewhat obscure project of Western colonial and business expansion. Here, the critical reader is asked to be aware of Barry, the company representative, and his archetypal imperialistic outlook: "No way. These guys are going to have to learn to speak our language; I ain't learning theirs." More than once, we are told that the sailors need to be taught English because, simply put, they need to learn to follow and obey the instructions given by their English-speaking superiors. In other words, "their jobs would [become] menial" once the American and Norwegian managers joined the ship.

Perhaps what is most significant about Kendall's narrative, however, is that the protagonist manages to forge and maintain an ethical relationship with the men. That is to say, Gillian's own subjectivity also changes in a fundamental way. In the case of *Mr. Ding's Chicken Feet*, Gillian provides a fascinating case study for the manner in which the individual re-envisions and realizes herself through social encounters initially based on a premise of otherness.

Ranbir Banwait writes from Vancouver where she is a graduate student in English Literature at Simon Fraser University.



Gillian Kendall

ARTSCORP (continued from page 10)

that these organizations will have a harder time demonstrating success.

Speaking of success, another disturbing phenomenon has quietly taken place at the Canada Council – once again, not announced to the public, but definitely in practice – something called the Healthy Organizations Initiative. This initiative asserts that the Council will only fund those organizations that show a rosy financial picture. Wait a minute, literary publishers receive cultural funding in the first place because the market for their titles is a small one. Those who embark on literary publishing face tremendous challenges and the sheer fact of survival demonstrates how savvy, streamlined and resourceful managers of public funds they are. This is certainly also true of other arts organizations, most of whom accomplish a great deal on very tight budgets.

One realizes that after the 'sponsorship scandals' bureaucrats are keen to insure responsible disbursement of public funds. However, when organizations fulfill their mandate, and in the case of literary presses, use public funding to create trade books that could not otherwise be published, it is clear that the funds have been used for the appointed purpose. If robust fiscal health is to be the basis for the awarding of public funds, it means that the most literary of Canadian presses or the most daring of dance companies, for example, are in danger of obliteration. On the strength of an applicant's financial statement, program administrators now have the right to prevent the jury from ever seeing an application... So much for 'jury by peers.' That too has quietly been subverted.

Still another policy change that came about recently, and again with little discussion, is a new multi-year funding structure for Block Grant publishers. Starting this year, publishers receive support for two years (at an identical level) and, for the second year of funding, are asked to submit only a report, rather than a full application for assessment by a jury. We'll be watching to see how this plays out. If the report sub-

If robust fiscal health is to be the basis for the awarding of public funds, it means that the most literary of Canadian presses or the most daring of dance companies, for example, are in danger of obliteration.

mitted fails to impress in some area (such as the financials), might the second year of funding be denied and who would make that decision, an administrator or a peer assessment jury?

It seems obvious that restoring adequate levels of funding to the programs designed to support writers and publishers, would also solve the issue of 'healthy organizations.' Writers and artists need to know about and respond to these matters.

Changes are taking place on a bureaucratic level that can have wide-ranging repercussions throughout the cultural community and there has been little public information or dialogue. There is a very real possibility that under these new attitudes, the most artistic of cultural organizations, such as the literary presses, may be dropping like flies. If only large firms are left to publish the nation's writers and if the bottom line is the only value that matters, how will new and alternative voices be heard?

The Canada Council has quietly adopted new policies without public discussion or announcement. Peer assessment based on artistic excellence has taken a backseat to institutional values of size and wealth. Is the approach taken in the disbursement of SOFI dollars a one-time only phenomenon, as the Council has affirmed, or is it simply the first public display of a new attitude towards cultural funding in general? Artists and arts organizations must address this question, and quickly, to prevent the erosion of the hard-fought foundation of our Canadian cultural landscape.

The PRRB invites your comments. Please send to <editor@prrb.ca>.

Carol Ann Sokoloff is a poet and singer-songwriter who lives in Victoria, B.C.



Suddenly Dance Theatre of Victoria, one of the more exploratory dance companies. Photo by Miles Lowry.

GEOGRAPHY OF A WEST COAST DREAMER

John Carroll

In Timothy Gray's new book *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim*, the author attempts to map the American poet's journey to a position of influence shaping attitudes about Pacific Rim culture.

In the scope of his approach, Gray includes historical, sociological, cultural, biographical, critical, semiotic, and geographical analyses of Snyder's writing (largely his poetry); narratives of the political and social climate of America during the Cold War, including specific focus on the cultural shifts marked by events such as the San Francisco Renaissance and the neo-tribal Hippies movement; exegeses of Zen Buddhist texts; depictions of central Buddhist mythological figures; explication of classic Chinese poetic form; referrals to key works of post-modernist critical theory and gender studies; and lessons in West Coast eco-systems nested in dissertations on human geography. By the end of the book, I felt rather like I had been invited to a reading at a North Beach coffee house and then been kidnapped and frogmarched across densely forested terrain populated intermittently by swamps.

Not that this is a bad book. It is a very good book in many ways. I will never look at Snyder's poetry in the same way after now discovering its historical and cultural roots. And as an inhabitant of the Northwest Pacific Rim, I have gained a richer sense of my place in this *communitas* of humans, plants, and animals. However, Timothy Gray's work did frustrate me at times, largely because it takes on too much and consequently loses focus.

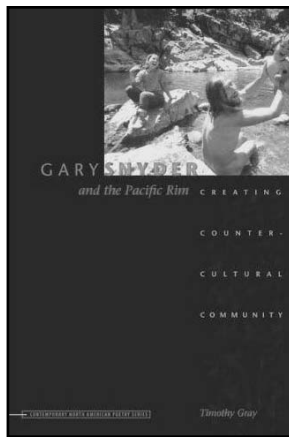
Gray is at his best as an historian and commentator on the development of the idea of the Pacific Rim itself, which he traces back to the 1939-1940 Golden Gate International Exposition and the liberal monthly journal *Amerasia*. His story of the San Francisco Beats and Snyder's position as shaman of that literary community is keenly observant and enlightening. These areas of attention serve his general purpose, as established in his introduction, which is to explain "how a white writer located himself psychically and physically in what cold war America usually deemed Asian space" and to do so by examining the "cultural, sociological, and libidinal practices shaping Snyder's Pacific Rim consciousness."

Gray begins by declaring his own interest in the "cross-cultural energies that circulate in avant-garde literary communities." Specifically, his interest is in how these energies were fed and directed by Snyder whose interest in the Pacific Rim as a "unified geometric construct" evolved from his early days growing up in the Puget Sound. Snyder's interest in eco-systems was nurtured then, as well as his lifelong interest in how North American indigenous peoples understood these systems. Gray demonstrates how certain key epiphanic moments developed Snyder's sense of a connection between the Pacific Northwest and other places on the Pacific Rim, specifically Asia. These moments stimulated his passion for study of Asian culture and spirituality, and they ultimately led to a twelve year sojourn in Japan.

When Snyder moved to Japan to study Zen-Buddhism, Gray argues, this "long sojourn along an interconnected Pacific Rim was crucial to San Francisco bohemians," because it gave them "the geographic spacing they needed to articulate their counter-cultural message." Through his writing, Gary Snyder became the "mobile leader" of the literary community in the 50's and 60's largely by providing "anthropological, linguistic, neo-tribal, and environmental models" that offered alternatives to cold war politics and the "aggressive frontier mentality" systemic at the time in the United States. His extended travels in Asia, a first for a member of the San Francisco Renaissance community, and his serious study of Asian languages and religions served as an antidote to the rather "naïve strain of Orientalist discourse that held sway in San Francisco's bohemian circles."

In order to demonstrate Snyder's share in developing a Pacific Rim consciousness within the artistic community, Gray first traces the origins of the San Francisco literary scene from the early meetings in Kenneth Rexroth's living room to the celebrated poetry reading at the "Six Gallery" in October of 1955 in which Snyder was a participant.

Gray chooses to pursue his analysis by dividing his discussion into two areas of inquiry. The first is the temporal—"community formation as an event... traceable



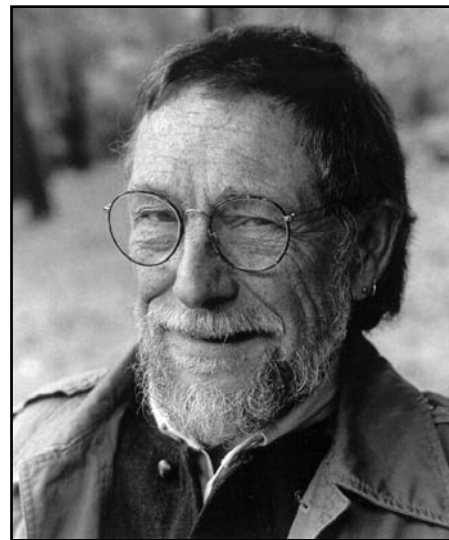
Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim.

Timothy Gray.
University of Iowa
Press: 2006. 352 pp.

back to a particular moment in history." The second area of inquiry is spatial, the cultural geography of locations in San Francisco appropriated by the artistic community. This is fascinating material. Gray ascribes Foucault's term "heterotopia" to those gathering places that provided the necessary space for the developing interest in dissolving "fixed definitions of American citizenship" and opening up the "possibility of global citizenship." And he conveys the vision of San Francisco in the late 1950's and 1960's as an embarcadero, or launching place for explorations into other cultures, other systems of perceiving one's place in a community. It is a holistic vision of the Pacific Rim as a diffuse community with origins in the "old days" of migratory movements of both humans and animals.

Gray is quite eloquent in his summing up of Snyder's ideas about place and about how, although a geographical place seems to be simply local, it has in fact "far-flung origins, which in turn have far-reaching consequences for other places around the world." Gray argues that Snyder could be described as a modern Thoreau for believing that "proper governance of the land derives not from a handful of isolated aristocrats or bureaucrats, but instead from interaction among various communities of living creatures with the most basic investment in their particular geographic region." Or as Snyder put it, "I want to create wilderness out of empire!" These ideas can inspire readers now as much as they did when Snyder was first writing about them. Their relevance is perhaps even more crucial today.

Snyder's thinking about the cultural and physical geography of the Pacific Rim comes to fruition in his first book of poems, *Myths and Texts*. But here is where Gray's hold on his own purpose begins to slip, and where his multifaceted approach undermines rather than supports a cogent analysis.



Gary Snyder

Gray's position on the value of Snyder's seminal work is clear: "More than any American poem I can think of, *Myths and Texts* honors the geographic diffusions that make culture, community, history, and religion recognizable (because interdependent) paradigms." And he does pursue threads of argument that include the ecological sensitivity of the poems ("Logging"), inclusion of Native American sources (for example, the referencing of the Sioux prophet Drinkwater from *Black Elk Speaks*), the Pacific Rim connection with Asia (specifically, the T'ang Dynasty poet Han-Shan), archetypal animal behaviors and the role of the shamans, the Circumpolar Bear Cult, Buddha's Fire Sermon, and Taoist doctrine. These connections certainly serve to underscore Snyder's idea that poetry is "a riprap on the slick rock of metaphysics," and they contribute to the argument that Snyder was a maker of counter-culture community. But they also tend to blur the vision of Snyder as poet.

By the end of the first chapter, Gray's discussion becomes so acutely alert to cultural issues that Snyder takes on an iconic role, and his poems assume secondary importance when measured against their implications for the San Francisco Beat and Hippie community. As a result, Snyder's personal subtleties of thought and experience tend to blur in the context of the post-World War II United States consciousness.

The farther we travel in Gray's book along the timeline of Snyder's career as poet, the more we move away from its essence. First indications of what is to come in Gray's explication are noticeable at the end of the section on *Myths and Texts*. Gray notes his concern about Snyder's "gendered basis for this Pacific Rim meditation." He quotes from the poem "Burning 13":

*I pledge allegiance to the soil
of Turtle Island,
and to the beings who thereon dwell
one ecosystem
in diversity
under the sun
with joyful interpenetration for all.*
Gary Snyder

*Bluejay out at the world's end
perched, looked, & dashed
Through the crashing: his head is squashed.
symplegades, the mumonkwan,
it's all vagina dentata
(jump!)
"Leap through an Eagle's snapping beak"*

Gray posits that "by equating the body of a woman with the site of the void, 'Burning 13' perpetuates stereotypes of hysterical and empty women, whose primary function is to test the mettle of men who want their phallic mythos 'kept sharp.'" Those who might have trouble seeing that connection are left to their own speculation since Gray offers little support other than a footnote on Joanne Kyger's *The Japan and Indian Journals 1960-1964*. My point is not that his position is invalid, but that he is obligated to define it more completely and position it clearly within his general argument. He does neither, nor does he credit Snyder with a possible awareness of phallogocentric motifs and a self-conscious play upon them.

The title of Section Two, "The Poetics of Linking East and West," recalls us to the book's purpose, and here Gray does a fine job of showing the links between Snyder's translation work on Han-Shan and the Asian poetic traditions Snyder follows in his next collection, *RipRap*. Gray's discussion demonstrates convincingly how the poetry "conceives a new spatial register, one in which Eastern and Western cultures are allowed to meet and flourish." Following that, Gray's analysis of *Back Country*, perhaps Snyder's most famous collection, succeeds in demonstrating how the "Pacific Rim emerges as a space of 'human geography.'" Unfortunately, I found the analyses too



often hijacked by jargon, and frequently so in Gray's abundant use of quotation, as in this statement from David Palumbo-Liu: "[T]he body is a multiply inflected sign and a somatic entity demanding sustenance and satisfaction for its particular needs. " Maybe so, but isn't there a more direct way of expressing this?

Around the mid-point of the book Gray brings up "appropriations based on racial stereotypes." He writes about the so-called anxiety displayed by the Beat community over Snyder's planned departure for The American Zen-Buddhist Institute in Kyoto. This anxiety, Gray argues, manifested itself in certain displays of racism by his Beat counterparts. And it's true that many of the comments Gray quotes do suggest an underlying racial anxiety even though they are ostensibly made in jest. Nevertheless, when Gray criticizes some of Snyder's compatriots for their concern that Snyder would "slide over the color line and become 'more Chinese than Chinese,'" I wonder why Gray considers their attitude worthy of censure, while making the same objection himself to the New Age attitudes of San Francisco hippies attempting to appropriate the philosophies and styles of Native Americans. Is it possible that Snyder's friends might have simply been cautioning against dishonesty in attempting to co-opt another culture?

From this point on, Gray's interpretations of the poems feel more and more strained. For instance, Gray seems to be overreaching in his discussion of the poem "After Work," a part of the *Back Country* collection. In particular, Gray hears alarm bells at the following passage:

*I pull out your blouse
warm my cold hands
on your breasts.
you laugh and shudder
peeling garlic by the
hot iron stove.*

"Regarded from a feminist perspective," Gray argues, "this poem betrays an overdetermined distinction between gender roles." I wonder what this has to do with creating counter-cultural communities, and further, why Snyder cannot be one man in one moment, rather than a careful and scrutinized documenter of the perfect balance between male and female? This seems an unnecessarily deep delving for unsightly resonances when volumes of Bukowski, for example, await open and undisguised in their problematic attitudes towards gender roles.

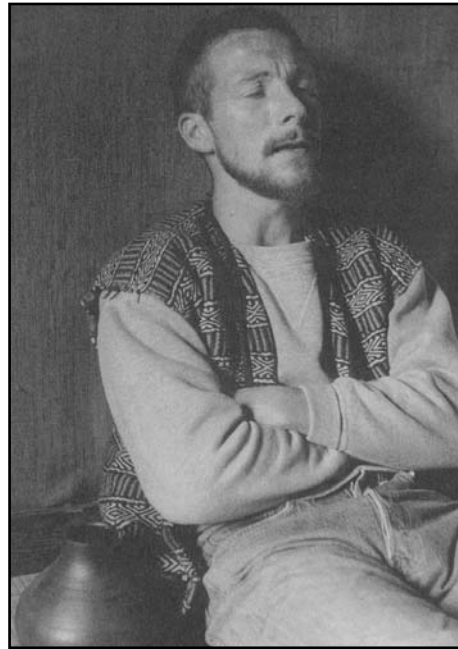
Furthermore, when Gray states that "the reader is left to wonder what the female subject of this poem would say," or argues that "we should continue to pay close attention to the... raced and gendered bodies misrecognized as empty reservoirs," I feel as if the author is deferring his responsibility to critique, and choosing instead to preach

instead. This tendency can result in a cause-and-effect viewpoint that denies the intricacies of personal experience and relationship essential to an individual person or event.

One extreme example of this tendency occurs when Gray comments on the relation between the audience at the Monterey Pop Festival and the sitarist Ravi Shankar:

The self-satisfaction one sees on the faces of blissed-out Monterey concert goers during Ravi Shankar's performance is attributable, at least in part, to the approval these people thought they were receiving from an Indian musician. As Deloria underscores in his example of hobby Indians, white Westerners retain the power to give away their love and respect to marginalized people and expect to be paid in kind.

Not only does this statement contain a rather yawning gap in logic by claiming to know what was going on in the minds of an entire crowd of young (and stoned) concert goers, but it also reaches far beyond the boundaries of Snyder's verse.



Gary Snyder in the Seventies

The waters clear soon after, however, when in the midst of a discussion of Snyder's mixed marriage with Masa Uehara, Gray steps in and charges that theorists "who cast aspersions upon love between 'different' types of people often take 'hermeneutics of suspicion' to a dangerous extreme." He points out that such reductions do a disservice to the couple for obvious reasons, and in addition "denigrate the hybrid identities of their offspring." Gray ends this riposte by wondering "whether some theoretical 'tactics of intervention'... end up distorting our perception of real people and their everyday relationships, which, in light of their own private mysteries, remain unknown to us." This passage swept over me like an ocean breeze and I could only wish such a sensible and wise stance could have been applied consistently throughout the book. Throughout

my reading of Gray's work, I found the passages devoted to the interaction between cultural geography and the inner life of the poet to be the most successful part of his exploration of Gary Snyder's often oblique but consistently inspiring verse.

John Carroll is a frequent contributor to PRRB. He is currently head of the English Department at The University College of the Fraser Valley. In his spare time he writes and studies avian bioacoustics.

CHILD AGAIN (continued from page 4)

Jackie is Sir John Paper now, an elderly and respected orator, who lives in a world more ordinary than magical. Yet he too feels he is missing something:

My soul is the dragon in me. Sometimes he says: My soul is the horse in me, by which he means, but does not add, the free unbroken horse. [...] Growing up and joining one's peers, then, is comically, to stifle the soul, break the horse, behead the dragon. Or at least forsake it.

When Puff begins to harass the citizens of magical Honah-Lee, they offer a reward for the hero who can deliver them his head and tongue. Hearing of Puff's rampages, Sir John fears for his old friend and feels the pull of the old adventure. He decides to leave his peers behind, but realizes on his journey that the hero's garb doesn't sit on him as well as he hoped. Finding Puff only makes it clear that he isn't the boy he was. And yet:

He gazes up at the toothy old rascal grinning down at him and perceives something of the scaly wide-bellied grandeur of his own inner being, the wild, winged strangeness of it, the unspeakable enigma at the core. Which core is not his, he is only of it.

Sir John, while attempting to take up the old adventure, in a sense finds himself read by it. Following the east wind to a land not on any map, he rediscovers what was missing in his respectable life. Stories are a fool's journey to where the wild things live and eternally lie in wait for us, where rationality itself is a wonderful fiction, and anyone's lost innocence will find its mirroring terror or delight.

Bernard Gastel lives and occasionally writes in Victoria, BC.

CALIBAN AND THE WITCH

Stephen Snelders

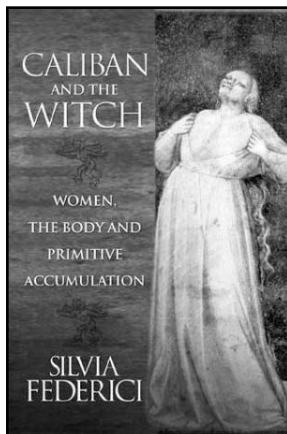
Caliban and the Witch is about control: control of women by men; control of labor by capital; control of the body by the powers-that-be. It's about the use of violence and ideology to disempower the individuals of different groups – European white women, and Native American women and men. Silvia Federici fuses feminist histories of witchcraft, Marxist theories of primitive accumulation, and a Foucauldian perspective of “bio-power” and the disciplining of the body into a highly deterministic vision of the origins of Western capitalism in the 16th and 17th centuries. Her vision provides her and other critics of present-day globalization with ammunition to show how our new world order is based on naked violence – in particular, on the torture and execution of hundreds of thousands of women in Early Modern Europe. She tracks a general political initiative directed against female autonomy, midwifery, and control over reproduction that created an abundant, obedient, cheap labor force for the global capitalism of that day.

But despite its title the book isn't about witches and witchcraft. It doesn't concern itself with exploring the realities of witchcraft by historical and anthropological methods, or with the underpinnings of the phenomena of witchcraft in earlier shamanism and religion as was attempted by Carlo Ginzburg. Federici's focus is, of course, legitimate. But other limitations in her study tend to undermine the convincing power of her arguments. Her book is explicitly not about male witches, though they may have been a higher percentage of the accused. She chooses to see witchcraft as an exclusively female phenomenon. Such reductionism leaves me unsatisfied because, as Lara Apps and Andrew Gow have argued in *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe* (2003), the demonologist ideologues behind the witch hunts did not perceive the witch as female. It is highly relevant to Federici's arguments that the witch could be and was also perceived as a male, though a feminized one. And there is more reductionism in ignoring the differences between regions, the differing intensities and chronologies of witch hunts. For instance, the thesis of her book leaves unexplained why the Netherlands, which was in the forefront of the rise of capitalism, had the lowest intensity of witch hunts. Federici presents her history as an abstract path leading to the future (our present), instead of as a “Garden of Forking Paths” full of contradictions, chaotic movements, and rewinds.

By reducing the complexity of the phenomena, she describes and explains everything within a framework of materialistic determinism, undermining the political firepower of her argument. Her chosen method of research has been a reading of the published secondary literature, but she might have been better served had she taken a closer, fresher look at the primary historical sources. While that might have undermined her main argument, it might also have offered material to illuminate it. Even a quick reading of Alison Rowlands's *Witchcraft Narratives in Germany: Rothenburg 1561-1652* (2003) might have allowed her to explore Rowlands' claim to have discovered an archetypal figure of a “bad mother” in the records of the women indicted for witchcraft.

Radical history – the research of history from the perspective of the insolent, the insurgent, and the persecuted – is a project that has become highly unfashionable among present-day historians. Not only for political reasons, but also because of the unsophistication of deterministic views on history. Being a historian myself I think that determinism can be countered by renewed and closer readings of primary sources. Such readings make the work of Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker on the insurgent and revolutionary tendencies of an ethnic diverse “motley crew” of Atlantic sailors in the 16th-18th centuries so very interesting (cf. *The Many-Headed Hydra* (2000)). By presenting the viewpoint of the sailors as they reconstruct them Linebaugh and Rediker do not give us (as they might themselves think) the “truth” about maritime history – instead they give us an essential and enlightening perspective. Or one could follow the route pursued by Peter Lamborn Wilson in books such as *Pirate Utopias* (1995) and ransack historical records to create prose poems with political intent. In neither of those cases does radical history serve to give us a new

(continued on page 27)

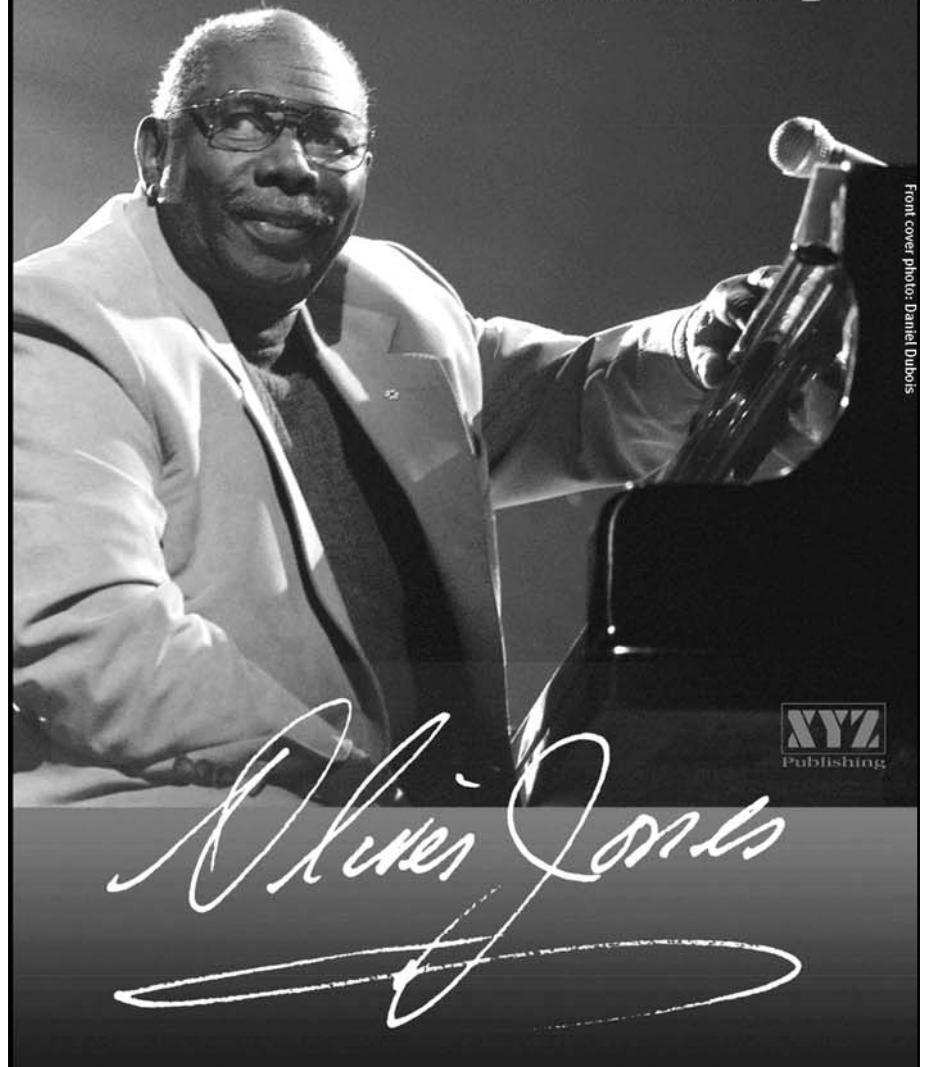


Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation
Silvia Federici
Autonomedia,
288 pages,

OLIVER JONES

THE MUSICIAN,
THE MAN

a biography by
Marthe Sansregret



Front cover photo: Daniel Dubois

OLIVER JONES: The Musician, The Man
an exclusive, authorized biography
by Marthe Sansregret

Making music comes naturally to Oliver Jones, one of Canada's finest and best-loved jazz piano players. He gave his first concert at the age of five and continues to tour extensively and perform at major international jazz festivals. He has recorded 17 albums, the first of which launched the record label Justin Time. Jones has received many awards to acknowledge his achievements, both as a musician and a human being. These include a Juno, the Martin Luther King Jr. Achievement Award, the Order of Canada, and the Governor General's Performing Arts Award.

ISBN 978-1-894852-22-7 375 pp. b&w photos TP \$29.95



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THE YEAR OF MAGICAL THINKING

Linda Rogers

“If”—two little letters, the most powerful conjunction in the English language, is the matrix for alchemy, the supposition that we are creatures who can, through magical thinking, direct our own destiny. I knead my bread sixty times, the age of an ailing friend, then she will get better. If I avoid pavement cracks my mother’s back will remain intact. If I hold my breath through the tunnel, there will be clean air for the world. My youngest son described to me the existential agony of watching a friend drown in a river so cold he could not move his arms and legs fast enough to save him, lamenting that there was no magic to prevent one moment from turning into the next, when life became death.

Didion wrote: “I think about swimming with him in the cave at Portuguese Bend, about the swell of clear water, the way it changed, the swiftness and power it gained as it narrowed through the rocks at the base of the point. The tide had to be just right. We had to be in the water at the very moment the tide was right. We could only have done this a half dozen times at most during the two years that we lived there but it is what I remember. Each time we did it, I was afraid of missing the swell, hanging back, timing it wrong. John never was. You had to feel the swell change. He told me that. No eye is on the sparrow but he did tell me that.”

“If” is what happened to Joan Didion, not once but twice in her year of magical thinking, when both her husband and their daughter swam from the river of reality to the ocean of legend. How is a sensitive woman to bear the absolute ruin of her carefully constructed (Quintana Roo, their daughter, was “wanted”) family life, as she watched her heart-vulnerable husband drown in grief for their ailing daughter?

We writers often say to one another during times of duress, “Did you get a poem out of it?” understanding that writers use ritual language to transcend tragedy. That is our salvation and our gift to the world. Joan Didion is a writer of astonishing clarity. In this amazing documentation of bereavement, she steps outside herself to witness the process in which she is an unwilling participant. That witnessing is the numbing incantation that keeps her sane, the way adrenalin will protect the body from pain.



Joan Didion

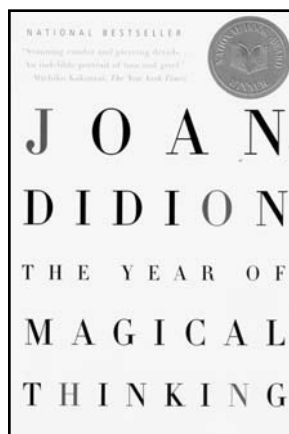
She takes the shattered glass house of her life and re-builds it, shard by painful shard, until there is a new transparent woman to inhabit.

That new woman will have to sustain the death of the daughter who was critically ill at the time of writing. It is interesting to compare this book with Isabelle Allende’s *Paula*, magical stories told to her comatose daughter. Although Didion’s acerbic realism and Allende’s Hispanic surrealism are from different planets, their responses are predictably comparable. Both use the power of imagination to reject and ultimately accept the eventuality of death.

When John Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, his widow repeated the details to everyone she met. Like the ancient mariner, she slowly unburdened herself of survivor’s guilt. Through the telling and re-telling, she slowly freed herself from disbelief. This is what Didion has done in the almost detached language of the reporter.

The documentation of sorrow in *The Year of Magical Thinking* is beautiful beyond words. More than a record of sadness, it provides a new liturgy for survival in the age of skepticism. There may be no heaven, but that doesn’t mean the beautiful moments are ephemeral. In capturing the very special co-dependency of her life with the writer John Dunne, she creates a shrine to marriage, a beacon that is inspirational not only for her but for those lucky enough to experience the words she has written. A great love is never wasted. It grows and inspires. In this troubled world, we need the light that Joan Didion has revealed in her exploration of grief.

Linda Rogers new novel is *The Empress Letters from Cormorant Books*.



The Year of Magical Thinking,
Joan Didion,
Vintage, \$17.95 Cdn

BACKWATER MYSTIC BLUES

Martin Van Woudenberg

Lloyd Ratzlaff’s book, *Backwater Mystic Blues*, is unfortunately burdened with one single out-of-place word on its cover, “essays.” In the competitive world of literature, this designation is not likely to inspire shouts of joy and clamoring for the latest reiteration. Essays are what we read and write because our professors tell us to, because we have something to debate or affirm, because we need to be up-to-date, or are what we check vigorously for accuracy. Seldom do we curl up by the fire or outside in the sunlight with a good book of articles and a sentiment keyed for introspection. This is precisely where Ratzlaff’s book belongs, however.

Each of the twenty-five sections present snapshots centered on particular events or emotions in the author’s life. As a former pastor and counselor, the writer has ample stores to draw upon. Unlike many books from former Christians now Atheists or former Atheists now Christians, this collection never bends too far from grounded honesty and the notion of a journey. Ratzlaff is on a tour through life, and along the way he finds cause for backtracking, rerouting, and pausing to take stock of the situation. He refreshingly steers clear of accusing institutions or people for where he ended up, but draws instead on previous experiences and the measures of each he still carries with him. Whether it is first love, conflicts at school, professional pressures, failed or new relationships, death of loved ones, or international travelling, the writer remains fully in control of both his perspective and his pen.

The pages radiate a refreshing honesty and openness that dozens of therapy sessions could seldom affect, and as a payoff the reader receives not only a window into a life, but a soul. In contemplation of Ratzlaff’s, one is challenged to contemplate their own in an environment that practically compels it. The author’s background as both pastor and counselor pays huge dividends here. The drag of the mundane and the mixed rapture/terror of the divine both find expression – the mundane made keenly relevant and the divine fully believable and grounded.

Robert Frost said about poetry, “No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader.” It is unclear whether he ever imagined the same could be said about essays, but *Backwater Mystic Blues* is likely the first collection of these among the hundreds this reviewer has read that brought spontaneous tears to the eyes. The author’s use of words, rhythm of thought and image is pure poetry disguised as a “mere” addition to this genre. It is unfortunate that author or publisher chose to give this collection the designation they did. As a result it will likely be overlooked by selective readers or stores as either a grind or a bore; nothing could be further from the reality. *Backwater Mystic Blues* deserves to be read, and reread. Consider it narrative poetry, a collection of reflections, a series of intimate snapshots if you will – and find the soul of a poet and a friend within its pages. It is time curled up in a chair before fire or sunshine well spent.

Martin Van Woudenberg is an author and educator with three published books. He writes regularly for PRRB, and currently resides in Langley, British Columbia with his wife and four children.



Backwater Mystic Blues,
Lloyd Ratzlaff,
Thistledown Press,
Saskatoon, 2006.

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MOON AS SYMBOL: THE MYSTERIOUS FEMININE IN CAROLYN ZONAILO

Nola Accili

A finalist in the A.M. Klein Poetry Prize for her collection *The Goddess in the Garden*, Carolyn Zonailo was born in Vancouver and now lives in Montreal. In this, her 12th book, she presents a delicately rendered yet powerful vision of the feminine essence, *Sophia* or spiritual wisdom, embodied in the metaphor of the moon. In her striving to unify nature and spirit Zonailo takes the reader through various “lunar” phases that trace a movement from a kind of spiritual darkness, or eclipse, to full light or vision.

The poetic journey begins with *exile*, a series of works that represent the mind’s struggle to locate order, peace and unity in the midst of a chaotic, violent and sometimes very oppressive world—a world in which time, for instance, inevitably wears on the physical self. “Why do they call it/ the golden years?” the narrative voice asks in “My body Is A Machine”, followed by the questions:

*Am I the eye inside
these five senses: seeing,
tasting, smelling—
or the I that drives the machine?
Am I a consciousness,
a brain sitting on top
of the corporeal me?*

In “The Garden of the Dead”, the image of a decaying Eden is presented:

*This garden is planted with parts of corpses,
planted with fear and panic and tears,
planted with the seeds of war—*

There is a sense of urgency in this first group of poems that culminates in a plea to all humanity to do better—that it is indeed *possible* to do better. In a prayer called “Beloved”, Zonailo conjures the need for a collective and universal end to conflict, for the Sun and Moon to, alas, unite: “We pray for Mars and Venus to conjoin/in love, not war.” And “We pray: do nothing. We pray: kill nobody.”

Next Zonailo moves to *desire*—a phase that strives to link body and spirit through the notion of a quiet, contemplative mysticism. Leaving images of the decaying body behind, the reader is carried out of the moon’s wintery phase and into dream-like spring. In “Afternoon Sleep”, the ethereal voice evokes this vision:

*I want another’s body
to lay down beside
my perfect body
on blue cotton sheets
that are soft and freshly
laundered, with pillows plumped*

This notion of mystic unity re-emerges in the poem “Three”, where Zonailo presents an androgynous equilibrium in the feminine (Moon) and masculine (Sun) of Leonardo’s famous pentagram:

*Yes, a star on your back,
five-pointed like da Vinci’s
drawing—flung-out arms,
extended legs, head on top*



the moon with mars in her arms.
Carolyn Zonailo.
Ekstasis Editions, 2006

WHAT THE AUNTYS SAY

Morgan Stafford O'Neal

There is no shortage of poetry in circulation nowadays, and one gets tired of being dragged into the internal banalities of so-called poets who assume that every word they write is worthy of the paper its written on. But Sharron Proulx-Turner distinguishes herself from the run of the mill in her “caustic and powerful creation poem,” *what the auntys say*. The poet sings the “old lady” into being in language and rhythm, and the ‘old lady’ sings the world into being in dust and grass. “Retold by the *auntys* of the title, *what the auntys say* is serial poetry with wit as dry and humour as rich as the land that bred it. Stirring magic into the mundane, Sharron Proulx-Turner bleeds elegy through the colloquial, fusing history, soil and Alberta farmland into a dense, fluid neo-epic. Language soars.”

In the case of this book, the advertising blurb is true to its word. *What the auntys say* is a real achievement, and as “the culmination of years of rumination on roots and the power of language” it does Proulx-Turner’s Metis heritage proud. Shortlisted for the 2003 Gerald Lampert Memorial Award for Poetry, in both form and content, this book is a joy to behold, a densely packaged gift of knowledge offered up in the spirit of ancestral wisdom. There is as much truth in a recipe for bannock discreetly interwoven with social critique of the colonial past as there is in any patronizing commonplace delivered from the pulpit of a preacher or the lectern of a pedagogue. In the opinion of the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award Judges, the book “is beautiful in its forms and whole, drives out fear, is full of elation and vigor, funny, smart and gentle, with a lovely use of refrains and a historical consciousness. The old lady trickster is wonderful.”

Although there is no shortage of shocking imagery, each traumatic figure is tempered by the generosity and humor of the literate voice that utters the violence. The poet’s eye is always a critical one: “And out pops the old lady / body raining flying fills the breeze / picks up that paleskinned blueyed baby / how can anyone hate a baby is what goes through her head / this is just after she sees them folks in whitetown / put that baby in a vice / and squeeze” (Part iiiii, *Many mother-tongued and too big for that one*, “Full-winged and awed to cheechauk” 101). The old lady gets her knowledge from the same source we are expected to discover it, language. She reads the messages left for her in the notes of random event and encounter: “a note the old lady finds frozen in hail the size of a goose egg [knowledge of the natural world]... a note the old lady finds frozen in hail the size of george erasmus [the teachings of the elders]” (Part iii, *You must break them apart until the children are read*, “Rinsing off the whites of eggs” 93).

This knowledge, this wisdom Proulx-Turner turns over to us when we read her poetry, is truly a gift, for we come away somehow very much richer for the effort and experience of reading. Each word, phrase, line, verse, poem, is an intimate note left just for us, “frozen in hail the size of maria campbell” (75), the size of Sharron Proulx-Turner. For as a poet she has earned herself the office of elder and teacher. She has earned the title not because she holds a Master’s Degree in English from the University of Calgary where she has taught at Old Sun and Mount Royal Colleges, but because she has produced a book of poetry that speaks from the heart directly to the Metis Nation and beyond.

When she took to writing, “writing out the silence writing out the pain / there’s where there’s a teacher from her school” who tells her that she is very talented, but that obviously “it’s the white in her makes her write that way” (84). She has proved this ‘old bag’ wrong, it’s the Metis in her that makes her write. Sharron Proulx-Turner is a Metis, of Mohawk, Algonquin, Huron, Ojibwe, Micmaw, French and Irish ancestry, for whom “writing is a sacred gift.” She was raised in the Ottawa River valley. A previously published memoir of abuse —*Where Rivers Join*—was short-listed for the Edna Staebler Award for Creative Non-Fiction. Her work has been widely anthologized in *Crisp Blue Edges: Indigenous Creative Non-fiction, My Home As I Remember, Writing*



what the auntys say
Sharron Proulx-Turner.
McGilligan Books, 2002
120 pages, \$16.95

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THE PILLOWBOOK OF DR JAZZ

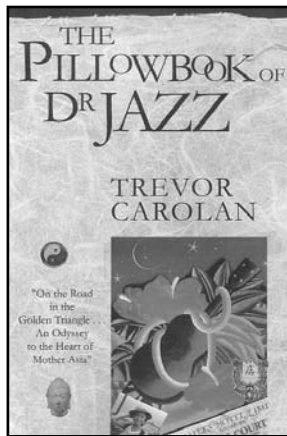
Hillel Wright

The *Pillow Book of Dr. Jazz* is a fictional travelogue through South and East Asia by a fictional Canadian broadcaster and his Japanese-Canadian girlfriend. Although exact dates are not given, through hints dropped by the author, including a few historical references, topical at the time, we can deduce that the trip takes place in the early to mid 1980s, during what might be described as the global trekking period.

The story begins in Vancouver where Dr. Jazz, a late-night DJ on Canadian public radio, is faced with a serious dilemma. He has only recently begun his dream job, but his girlfriend Nori has taken off for parts unknown. Suddenly, he gets word from her from Bangkok and he's given an ultimatum – *it's either me or your job!* So without too much agonizing or *I Ching* consulting, Dr. Jazz is off, following the advice of an experienced trekking friend: "Everyone loves Asia, but they adore Thailand."

For the next 240 pages Nori and Dr. Jazz touch down in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, India, Nepal, Burma and Japan before winding up in Hawaii. Nice work if you can get it. Without speculating on the lines between fiction and autobiography, it can be revealed that the author is the Asia Editor of the west coast Canadian-based *Pacific Rim Review of Books* and periodically travels in all of the above-mentioned countries, among others.

The tone of the book is part travelogue in the style of Paul Theroux and part Beat doctrine morphing into New Age pop philosophy, in the style of Jack Kerouac



The Pillow Book of Dr. Jazz

Trevor Carolan,
Ekstasis Editions 2006,
255pp., \$21.95

morphing into Gary Snyder. Dr. Jazz provides most of the narrative, as the garrulous Irish-Canadian and Nori chips in with the occasional pearl of common-sense wisdom, appropriately blending Eastern mysticism with Western practicality.

Along the road the couple meets up with a gallery of gurus, rogues, wise men and fools from among the many cosmopolitan fellow trekkers, resident monks, mercenaries and drug dealers who populated Asia 25 years ago and with no more than a few technological updates, probably still do. The pair are young enough – late 20s to early 30s – to be open to whatever comes their way, be it hashish, opium, yoga or meditation, yet mature enough to see their odyssey as an era in their lives, which keeps them from getting hung up on one temptation or side-tracked into dangerous dead ends.

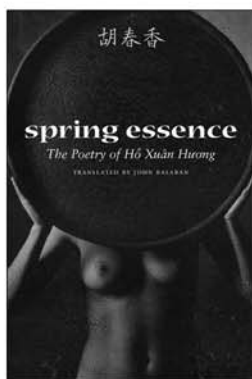
They do, however, suffer the occupational illnesses and accidents common to travelers in the Third World, whether in the cities or the wilderness. They cover all the climates, from the Himalaya mountains to the Burmese jungles and all the social sub-cultures, from the Golden Triangle, a no-man's land of poppy growers, primitive hill tribes and private armies of opium drug lords, to the starved-white shirt metropolitan city-state of Singapore – "Disneyland with the death penalty."

Their adventures are as varied as the people they meet, including trekkers from Europe, Australia and the States who are out to push the limits of their physical endurance, to locals who range from entrepreneurial tour guides to international heroin smugglers and from Hindu sadhus and Buddhist monks to left-over cultists from the counter-culture '60s.

Towards the end of the book, the couple reaches Japan, where Nori was born but has never really lived. Their takes on Kyoto, Osaka, Nara and Tokyo are quite unique and revealing, coming from two travelers from the West who have for many months been intensely immersed in the East. A good example is Dr. Jazz's favorite hangout in

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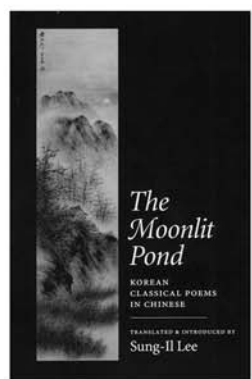
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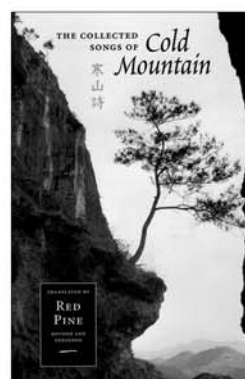
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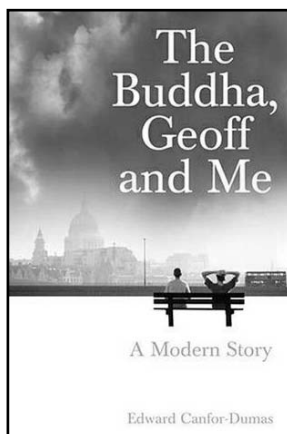
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THE BUDDHA, GEOFF AND ME

Patrick Carolan

Sometimes life throws us a curveball; that's what makes it interesting. Sometimes it throws us more than one at a time; that is what makes it hard. And sometimes life throws us so many at once that dealing with them all seems impossible. This is exactly the situation that Ed, the antihero of Edward Canfor-Dumas' *The Buddha, Geoff and Me* finds himself in. Out of work, dumped by his dream girl, at an impasse with his writing, and lacking any sort of family or social support network, Ed is in pretty rough shape. But when a chance encounter with Geoff—a middle-aged, friendly neighbourhood Bodhisattva who enjoys chanting, a pint, and a hard day's work—sparks an odd-couple sort of relationship, Ed begins to find some direction in his life. With the help of Geoff and a myriad of other Buddhists, Ed embarks on a long and occasionally arduous journey to get himself back on track.

Dumas presents readers with a laid-back, non-assuming story that is elegant in its casual nature, not unlike Geoff, its warm, gregarious mentor. The author does not look to astound the reader with intricate plot twists or pull huge surprise punches (though when it does they are unexpected and compelling). In many ways this book reads like a television series, with Ed's story falling into a familiar pattern that requires him to face some insurmountable problem, meet a Buddhist who dispenses some wisdom that allows him to get over it, and then confront some new insurmountable problem as soon as the last one has been dealt with. Given Dumas'



The Buddha, Geoff and Me,
Edward Canfor-Dumas.
Rider. 284 pp. \$24.95


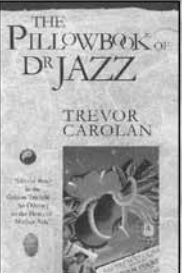

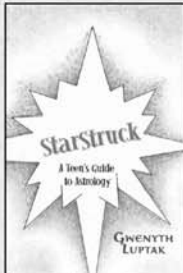





background as a scriptwriter this isn't unusual. What makes this story intriguing is how subtly human it is. Much of this is derived from its main character Ed. Simply put, Ed is unpleasant. He is stubborn and uncompromising, lacks persistence or motivation, manages to be both narcissistic and self-loathing at the same time, and in general can be a real downer. He seems to suffer from some form of mild depression, and often finds solace in the bottle. All of this is exacerbated by the fact that his world is crashing down around him, though even when the universe sticks out a hand to save him, he does little to seize it. But despite all of this Ed is in no way a bad guy, and readers will find themselves rooting for him. Perhaps the reason that he is so unpleasant, yet at the same time strangely relatable is that deep down there is a little bit of Ed in all of us, our "evil friend" (a favourite expression of his). In many ways he represents those shortcomings and foibles we hate to admit that we have.

In addition to the insight provided us by Ed's poor example, *The Buddha, Geoff and Me* also provides an excellent crash course in Buddhism for anyone that might be interested. From discussions about the nature of Karma to lessons on the drawbacks of a *Honzon* to an explanation of the Lotus Sutra, each new character that Dumas introduces provides some insight to the world of Buddhism. The one drawback to this is that the characters sometimes come off feeling a tad contrived for it, but the information is certainly welcome. In the end *The Buddha, Geoff and Me* is an enjoyable, light-hearted read, providing us with insight into the human condition and a few tips for living a better life and being a better person, all punctuated by the humour of poorly timed erectile mishaps and accidental Buddhist conversions. Dear reader, there's hope for the future.

Patrick Carolan's previous review in PRRB was "Welcome to the Slaughterhouse."

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HELPLESS

Elizabeth Rhett Woods

One of the more difficult challenges a writer faces in bringing about a willing suspension of disbelief, is that of presenting a morally reprehensible character in a believable, and possibly even sympathetic, way so that, without condoning the crime, the reader can at least understand the criminal. In *Helpless*, Barbara Gowdy succeeds admirably in depicting Ron, her protagonist, as a flawed man fighting desperately against his self-evident faults while remaining blind to other, more subtle, imperfections. Sometimes, however, the difficulty lies in suspending disbelief regarding the behaviour of other characters.

Ron is the proprietor of Ron's Appliance Repair, whose pride is his collection of classic vacuum cleaners, and whose shame is his attraction to pretty young girls in the Lolita phase of their lives, those few years between toddlerhood and puberty. He has a sometimes sexual relationship with his adult girlfriend, Nancy, and has for years disciplined himself to the imperfect and infrequent pleasure of driving by, or parking near, an elementary school to watch classes let out. But he does keep indulging his hankering, and on one such foray, he falls in love with nine-year-old Rachel, daughter of a single mother, Celia, who works two jobs, the second as a singer at a local lounge. Some evenings, Rachel joins Celia in one or two songs, although only from the doorway, never actually inside the bar. Ron, witnessing this, convinces himself that Rachel is being neglected by Celia, and probably abused by Mika, Celia's Hungarian landlord, who babysits Rachel on the evenings she doesn't accompany Celia to the bar.

Not letting himself think too far ahead, Ron fixes up a room in the basement, complete with frilly curtains, pretty furniture, Barbie dolls, and bars, and takes to lurking in his van outside Rachel's house. A power failure, during which Mika is knocked unconscious, and Rachel runs outside looking for help, gives Ron the opportunity to 'rescue' her, and carry her off to the pretty little prison he's prepared.

What follows is a variation on the Stockholm syndrome, as over the course of nearly a week, Rachel comes to trust her captors (Nancy is a reluctant and semi-loyal accessory), both of whom play on Rachel's fear of the 'slave traders', who (Rachel believes) lurk everywhere in the city, waiting to pounce on little girls like herself. Ron and Nancy promise to protect her from them.

At first, it is Nancy who sees to Rachel's needs, and talks to, and comforts her. Genuine affection for the child, and her grave and nervous reservations about what she and Ron are doing, leads her to assuage her guilt, first, by phoning Celia to let her know Rachel is okay, and later, by mailing a letter Rachel has written.

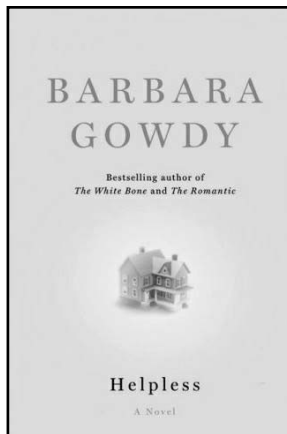
During this time, Ron's desires are growing stronger, despite his constant and valiant efforts to rein them in, and much of the tension in the latter part of the book derives from the reader's expectation that 'the worst', in some form, is inevitable.

While abhorring his continued imprisonment of Rachel, one can be on Ron's side in his desperate struggles against his baser self.

It is the behaviour of Rachel and Celia that is far more difficult to believe in or have sympathy for. Rachel has come across as a resilient and resourceful little girl, who has thought a good deal about how to escape. Therefore, when she has a chance to get away, and can only think of where to hide a note asking for help, and worse, when she runs back to her captors after being frightened by a stranger wearing a turban, disbelief comes crashing down; a gut reaction, not an intellectual one.

Even recognizing that she's only nine, and despite Gowdy's attempt to justify Rachel's behaviour, "In her amazement [at her prison door being left open] it didn't occur to her to escape," the scene remains unconvincing.

Not many pages later, disbelief collapses again. Celia and Mika, during one of



Helpless
Barbara Gowdy.
Harper Collins Canada
309 pages



Barbara Gowdy

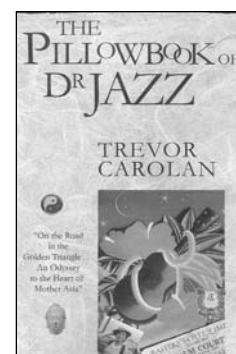
their many searches of city neighbourhood's, arrive at Ron's Appliance Repair. Discovering there is a room in the basement, they ask to look inside, but are prevented from doing so by an apparent emergency invented by the quick-thinking Nancy.

Shortly afterward, on that same afternoon, the letter from Rachel that Nancy had mailed, finally arrives, and Celia, Mika, and the police, deduce from its contents that she's confined in a basement. But neither Celia nor Mika remember the basement they'd so recently wanted to investigate. Gowdy, as if sensing how unbelievable this is, provides reasons for this failure, but again, they are not convincing. The two events occur too close in time, and rather than forgetting about the basement, Celia and Mika, on the way home, would likely have been regretting their lost opportunity, and vowing to return as soon as possible to have a look. It is unbelievable that the deduction that Rachel is being held in a basement, would not have immediately brought that unsearched basement to at least one of their minds. (Research has shown that unfinished actions are more likely to be recalled than completed ones.) Again, this was a gut reaction; a spontaneous, "I don't believe it."

These two breakdowns in belief arise from requiring characters to meet the demands of the plot rather than allowing the plot to unfold from the behaviour, thoughts, and feelings of the characters. Gowdy has provided a tidy ending which requires Rachel to remain in Ron's clutches as long as possible, but to insert some suspense in what is rapidly becoming routine among Rachel, Ron, and Nancy, and later, to prolong the suspense another page or two, Gowdy forces her characters out of character.

While worth reading, *Helpless* is too contrived to maintain the necessary suspension of disbelief, relying too heavily on coincidence, and the manipulation of character, to be entirely satisfying.

Elizabeth Rhett Woods has published four other books of poetry and three novels, including Beyond the Pale (Ekstasis Editions, 2006) and the underground classic The Yellow Volkswagen (PaperJacks, 1971).



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The Pillowbook of Dr Jazz

a novel by Trevor Carolan

Hip radio man, Dr. Jazz, gives up a coast to coast late-night show when girlfriend, Nori, suggests that he meet her in Bangkok, Thailand. Travelling on a shoestring, they journey along what Dr. Jazz calls "the old dharma trail" — a backpacker's network of cheap rooms and contacts throughout Asia. Originally published by Random House in Australia in 1999, Ekstasis is proud to release the first North American edition of this fresh novel about finding love and self through Asia's "otherness."

Trevor Carolan is the author of *Giving Up Poetry: With Allen Ginsberg At Hollyhock*, a memoir of his acquaintance with the late poet, as well as books of poetry, including *Celtic Highway*, his most recent from Ekstasis Editions. Carolan is also the editor of *Down in the Valley*, an anthology of poetry from the Fraser Valley, and International Editor of the *Pacific Rim Review of Books*. He teaches writing at Douglas College and lives in Deep Cove, BC.

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THE SEA

Linda Rogers

Once in a while, we are given a gift, a book so perfect it arrives and leaves our consciousness with the motion of waves. *The Sea*, last year's Man Booker winner, is such a book. Irish novelist, John Banville has proven John Donne's proverbial assertion, "No man is an island." An Islander, the word perfect storyteller knows we are all joined in the ebb and flow of the sea.

This is what makes his narrator, "Max," who has re-invented himself with a new name, so foreign to himself. Max, the grieving widow, has no idea how to connect past and present. It simply overtakes him like the wave that takes the two women he has loved most, one his childhood crush and the other his wife.

I have noticed that men age differently from women. When their power wanes, men retreat into isolation. Women become even more social. Anna, Max's photographer wife dies after taking a meaningful suite of photographs of her fellow hospice patients. She needs to love and understand their suffering in order to embrace her own. In doing this, she begins the swim out to sea that parallels the death of Max's playmate and first love, Claire.

Claire chose death. Max chooses death of the spirit. When he loses his wife, he returns to the place where he began the circular route that has brought him back to the terrible moment that defined him, because he doesn't know what else to do.

Banville carefully intersects past and present so that there is no confusion. We are allowed to be in every moment, and the resolution, when all comes together in the great shudder of understanding, is sublime. He does not allow us to fall into the sentimental trap of liking Max. Max, the poor boy with his nose to the window of the privileged, has all the weaknesses of a snob.

We do not like the family he admires, the small cruelties that justify their own perdition. It is not the end of the world when Claire and her mute sibling, a fraternal twin, drown together. They had no future because their matrix was corrupt. The twins took pleasure in hurting others; and Max admired them for all the wrong reasons.

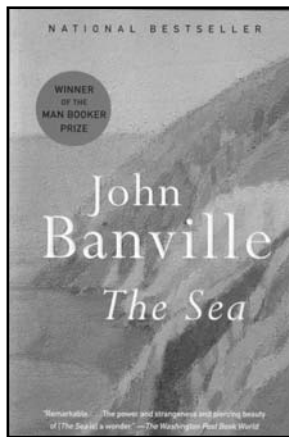
"I was not cruel. I would not kill a bird or steal its eggs. Certainly not. What drove me was curiosity, the simple passion to know something of the secrets of other, alien lives."

There is no redemption for Max. He was lucky to have Anna and the frustrated daughter who will herd him to his grave. Now he is in purgatory because there is no Yin in him. Anna took that with her and left him the fortune he can't take back to the sea that consumes him.

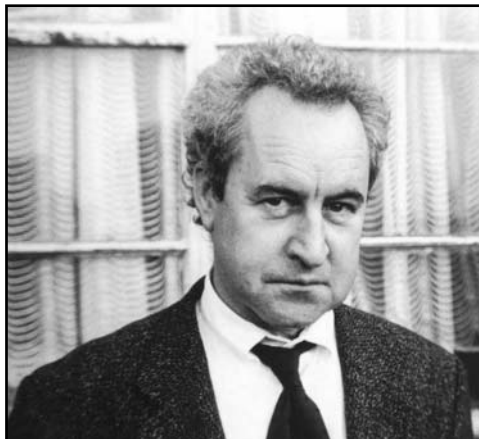
"As I stood there, suddenly, no not suddenly, but in a sort of driving heave, the whole sea surged, it was not a wave, but a smooth rolling swell that seemed to have come up from the deep, as if something vast down there had stirred itself, and I was lifted briefly and carried a little way toward the shore and then was set down on my feet as before, as if nothing had happened. And indeed nothing had happened, a momentous nothing, just another of the world's great shrugs of indifference."

It is ironic that no one speaks and writes the English language like the Irish. All the bitter ironies that wash up on their shores are deftly translated into words that are blinding in their intensity. It is as if they stand on their stormy beaches with mirrors; and we should be grateful for glass, all of it: mirrors, windows, and the broken bottles that are smoothed by the ocean's continual motion.

Linda Rogers new novel is *The Empress Letters from Cormorant Books*.



The Sea
John Banville,
Vintage Books, 2006,
195 pages



John Banville

JAPANAMERICA

Todd Shimoda

Japan and the U.S. have had a fruitful yet often uneasy trade partnership in the last few decades. Long a net importer, Japan became a net exporter in the 1960s largely due to the steel and auto industries. While Japanese car makers continued their assault on market share, the electronics industry began to do the same in the 1970s, soon dominating the market. Japanese pop cultural exports began making their inroads into mainstream America in the 1980s starting with sushi, karaoke, and video games (e.g., Pac-Man). In the 1990s, manga (comics), and anime (animation) exploded onto the American cultural stage with titles and characters such as Pokeman, Totoro, Yu-Gi-Oh, and *Spirited Away* (winner of an Academy Award).

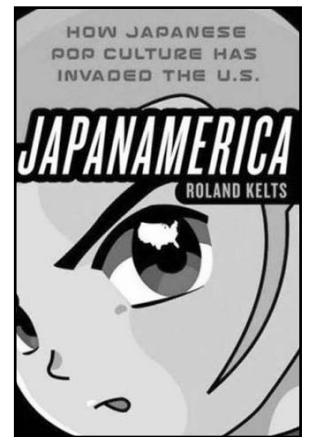
Roland Kelts explores the rise of these pop culture icons in *Japanamerica*, the book title implying not so much a blending of two cultures but a concatenation, a sticking-together. Unlike the auto and electronics industries, which spend considerable resources and time studying the American consumer, the Japanese manga and anime producers create their works nearly exclusively for the Japanese market. And yet American audiences have embraced the Japanese storylines, characters, and visual styles, which on the whole are considerably different from American comics and animations.

Kelts gives us a vertical look into the reasons for the appeal and success of manga and anime. He reports on all levels from the fan (known in Japan and increasingly in America as otaku), to the artists and animators, to the top people in the studios and production companies. The serious fan devotion to these virtual worlds is difficult to explain in rational, psychological terms, given the breadth of the genre involved, from the cute, blobby character of Totoro, to the post-apocalyptic worlds of robots, to the hardcore pornographic, often violent hentai manga and anime. Kelts takes into the minds of the fans and creators with a non-judgmental, almost dispassionate way. He lets his interviewees speak for themselves, even when one otaku, for example, tries to justify horrific rape scenes often found in hentai manga. Readers are left to judge for themselves whether the differences in actual rape statistics between Japan and the U.S. (much lower in Japan) is a credible reason for the scenes. Kelts does point out that in Japan there is a clear distinction between fantasy and public behavior, whereas in America, fantasy is often believed correlated with actions.

Despite the dissimilarities in Japanese and American comics and animation, there is mutual admiration and imitation on both sides. Unlike the auto industries or electronics which have gone through severe trade conflicts, there is a cozier relationship, even to the point of imitation being the sincerest form of flattery. When the similarities between Disney's *The Lion King* (1994) and Japan's Osamu Tezuka's *Kimba the White Lion* (1960s series) were pointed out, there was no lawsuit or monetary settlement. As one of Tezuka's colleagues point out, "If Tezuka were alive when *Lion King* was released, and if he knew about even the rumor that Disney might have copied elements of his work, he would have been proud." Tezuka, considered Japan's Walt Disney, loved Disney's stories and illustrations and in the beginning of his career would copy them while watching Disney films. Reworking the characters and stories into something more "Japanese" (usually involving more inward-looking angst), he would peddle his works on the street.

Kelts has one foot firmly in Japan the other in the U.S., living in both countries and having parents from each country as well. His unique perspective provides a solid grounding to his observations, and his writing style is highly readable and succinct. My only complaint is that the book could have used more illustrations. There are a few color plates but with a book about such a visual medium, more illustrations would have provided a richer experience for the reader — although I have heard from other publishers that it is notoriously difficult to get reprint permission from Japanese companies.

Todd Shimoda is the author of *The Fourth Treasure* and *365 Views of Mt. Fuji*. This review originally appeared in *The Asian Review of Books*: www.asianreviewofbooks.com



Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture Has Invaded the U.S.
Roland Kelts
Palgrave Macmillan
trade cloth, 256 pages

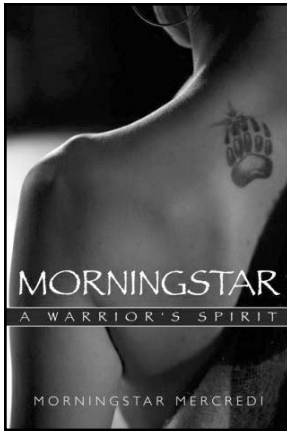
MORNINGSTAR: A WARRIOR'S SPIRIT

Frances Cabahug

Outrage is a word which is easily evoked by Morningstar Mercredi's memoir. *Morningstar: A Warrior's Spirit*, is a testament of how much difficulty it takes for one woman to rise above the sustained violence, abuse, and racism which she has been exposed to since childhood. The narratorial perspective is told largely in flashbacks, and it begins with the viewpoint of Mercredi as a five year old-child running in the street looking for her alcoholic mother. It is almost unimaginable that one so young and helpless would already be the victim of violence and neglect at home. The physical and emotional abuse grows even worse as Mercredi grows up; as early as 13 years-old, she has run away from home, and the streets are not any kinder. In between the countless rapes and the drug use and the drinking problem, the story is by equal turns disheartening and gut-wrenching.

Due to the first person narratorial style used throughout the book, the reader's role alternates between being a confidante and a witness unable to do anything but watch Mercredi's repeated struggles to recover from her addictions and traumas. Because the early exposure to the abuse has clearly fueled her dependency on alcohol, it is hard to judge or even prescribe a particular solution, highlighting the overwhelming helplessness that Mercredi must have no doubt faced as she tries to clean up her life. The high-risk lifestyle uncovered throughout the book particularly resonates with Vancouver's ongoing trial of Robert Pickton, charged with first degree murder of twenty-six women who worked the streets. However, Mercredi's position is that there are no easy solutions to extend to those who are at risk, and offers a piercing insight into the circumstances and motivations which drive those who choose to live as transients.

As Mercredi lived a transient lifestyle for many years, the book covers a lot of



Morningstar: A Warrior's Spirit.
Morningstar Mercredi.
Coteau Books. \$19.95

wandering from Uranium City to Vancouver to Fort Chipewyan, but the journeys are significantly temporal and psychological rather than geographical. While Mercredi moves forward in her life struggling to make a living, at the same time she finds strength and insight by going back into her family's past. Right from the introduction, Mercredi situates her abuse from the breakdown of her home, which in turn she contextualizes as an effect of the residential schooling her parents had to go through. Mercredi makes it clear that her mother's experience in the residential school caused her to be emotionally-withdrawn and unable to parent her children. While the memoir is personal, Mercredi contends that the problem is systemic and that her experiences resonate to a large number of aboriginal families, and that the effects can still be felt to this day.

In the search for wholeness and reintegration instead of retribution against those who have wronged her, Mercredi places her emphasis on understanding rather than castigation. While she situates her abuse and neglect due to an early unstable home life, the author nonetheless draws strength from the new family that she has created, particularly her son Matthew. It is in seeking to understand her own parents, and by the guidance drawn from her ancestral heritage and ceremonies, that Mercredi is able to understand what has been done to her—so that she in turn is conscious of what she passes on to her son. Mercredi wrote her memoir for the people who could relate to her story, to offer a testament that it is possible to break out of the cycle in order to heal the intergenerational impact of residential schooling.

While it is evident from the title that Mercredi's courage and fortitude is that of a warrior's, the battle is presented as a personal struggle rather than a confrontation between institutions and ideologies. This way, *Morningstar* Mercredi's story resists victimization. Not only does she gain the reins over her life, but over the narrative as well. This memoir is a testament of storytelling's ability to transform suffering into an affirmation of strength.

Frances Cabahug lives and writes in Vancouver, where she studies English Literature and Social Work at the University of British Columbia.

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His Doubtful Excellency

a memoir by **Jan Drabek**

In *His Doubtful Excellency: A Canadian Novelist's Adventure as President Havel's Ambassador*, Czech-Canadian author Jan Drabek, regails the reader with the escapades of an artist pressed into diplomatic service. When, after the fall of communism, his former schoolmate, playwright Václav Havel, becomes president of the Czech Republic, Drabek is named ambassador and chief of protocol, welcoming dignitaries such as Queen Elizabeth and Pope John Paul II. Drabek's poignant memoir of a pivotal moment in a changing global landscape has been a bestseller in Czechoslovakia. Adapted and translated by Drabek, author of 11 previous novels, *His Doubtful Excellency* takes an ironic view of post-communist Czech society, where corruption is rampant, "but somehow improved since it's now 'democratic corruption.'"

Jan Drabek is the author of eleven novels including the acclaimed *Report on the Death of Rosenkavalier* (M. & S.). His memoir of early years, *Thirteen* was published by Caitlin Press. Born in Czechoslovakia, Jan Drabek returned there in 1990 to teach English, and ended up an ambassador under president Václav Havel. He now lives in Vancouver, BC.

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THE LIZARD CAGE

Alexandra Moss

Even in comparison to the rest of Asia, Burma looms large in the Western conception of the exotic Orient. That air of mystery stems in part from the nation's Buddhist monuments and royal history, and to a degree from nostalgia for British colonialism, memorialized in the writing of Kipling, Orwell, and Maugham, and set in such tantalizing locations as Mandalay, Pagan, and the banks of the Irrawaddy. However, the main reason for Burma's continued aura of exoticism derives from the fact that it remains shut off from much of the world. Although tourists have increasingly begun to penetrate its borders, trickling in mainly from northern Thailand, Burma maintains its status as a state apart, isolated even from its neighbors by the oppressive politics of its military dictatorship.

All of that contributes to why *The Lizard Cage*, the first novel by Canadian writer Karen Connelly, is so impressive. Through her experiences traveling in Burma and the relationships she has built with refugees who, like herself, have taken up residence in Thailand, she has channeled the tenor of life in contemporary Burma. The novel successfully evokes the diverse sensory signatures of Rangoon streets, provincial monasteries, and a squalid prison for petty criminals and the political opposition. Nevertheless, its focus is more on the development of two central characters than on either of their surroundings.

The first of these protagonists is a pre-adolescent boy who can remember no home other than the jail. After the death of his father, who was on the prison staff, the boy carved out a niche for himself in the regimented but lawless society of the compound. Known to most of the people around him as 'little brother', or by a slur that



Karen Connelly

seems tantamount to 'catamite', this anonymous child is lost in the maw of a dysfunctional system. He has little sense of self until he is asked to serve the prisoner he calls the Songbird — a Burmese Bob Dylan imprisoned for inspiring revolution with his music — who gives the boy a nickname of his own. He calls the boy 'Free El Salvador', for the slogan printed on his only t-shirt. That baptism proves a turning point in the boy's life, and a hook on which he can hang his developing identity.

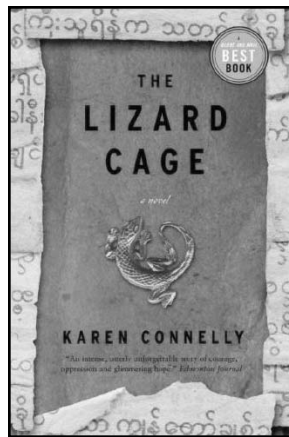
The Songbird is the other character around which *The Lizard Cage* revolves. The jailed musician's real name is Teza, which in Pali means 'a powerful and glorious fire'. Teza does not seethe in his cell, despite its isolation and forced discomfort. He is not angered that the wardens steal his food packages and leave him to subsist for days on end on the lizards he catches, kills, and devours raw.

Connelly embroils us in Teza's thoughts and spends chapters at a time invoking the reptilian mindset to which the title refers. We come to inhabit a psyche obsessed with the basest of needs, concentrated on the compulsions of the amygdala. That relic of evolution connects us, through our limbic system, to the lizards that Teza's situation compels him to capture. Eventually, however, we see the higher regions of his cerebrum win out. His Buddhist upbringing becomes a source of strength, a starting point for the reclamation of the glory and power of which prison has stripped him.

The novel is remarkable for having transgressed the territory of an unapproachable country and then going further, scaling the walls of a prison outside its capital. In her characterizations of Teza and the boy, Connelly has entered yet a third form of inaccessible space, beyond the borders and the barbed wire: the alterity of another's consciousness. Its portrayal of the minds of these two people, so different from each other and from the author, makes *The Lizard Cage* worthwhile reading even for those without a particular interest in the troubling politics of a troubled country.

Alexandra Moss is a writer and photographer who now works in television news in New York.

This review originally appeared in *The Asian Review of Books*:
www.asianreviewofbooks.com



The Lizard Cage
Karen Connelly
Vintage Canada
448 pages

AUNTYS (continued from page 16)

the Land and elsewhere. She currently lives in Calgary.

Daniel David Moses has described her poetry best by coining a term which encapsulates the essence of both the form and the content. In this sense he credits her with creating a new genre of literature in order to serve the Metis Nation. "What Sharron Proulx-Turner does with English must be what the Métis did to create themselves. *what the auntys say* is renewed storytelling, emotional, thoughtful, musical, humorous poetry. Mixing fable, autobiography, polemic and visions, her language is rich and trickstery, arriving in moments quotidian, then eternal, then horrific, then beautiful, a vivid voicing that rings and echoes. That human *metissage* is her message."

Morgan Stafford O'Neal lives in Vancouver, where he works as a writer and editor for First Nations Drum and Totem Pole Books.

PILLOWBOOK (continued from page 17)

Kyoto, the New World Cake Shop in Akonomiya, "...a good interpretation of a suburban American coffee shop. Audrey Hepburn would not have found it out of place...everything...was California Sunday morning circa 1975."

I found it delightfully enlightening to learn that unlike Beat poet Gary Snyder, who left California to meditate in a Zen temple in Kyoto, the next generation found Kyoto a place to relax in a laid-back hippie environment, a familiar taste of home after a long sojourn in the mysterious East.

Hillel Wright was born and raised in the USA, lived for 25 years on the West Coast islands of Canada and currently lives in Japan. *Bordertown* is his most recent novel.

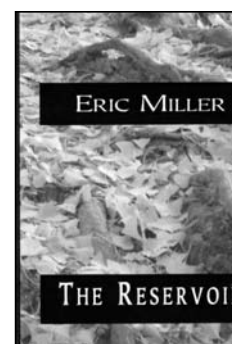
MOON (continued from page 16)

In the final phase of the moon, or *blessing*, meditations on rebirth and healing appear as Zonailo revisits ancestral lines, myth and regeneration, thus celebrating the power of the matriarchal spirit. In "Mother Egg—Split In Two Parts," the moment of conception and its ensuing joy, and hope, is entwined with nature. Eden is brought back to its original state: green, organic and pure.

*I slipped from the womb
like a shucked pea
from its pod—the green nest
split down the middle—
inside, sweet-tasting peas
lined up in a row,
delicate as a newborn's toes
and fingers, ripened perfectly*

Nola Accili teaches French at the University College of the Fraser Valley in Abbotsford, BC. Her work recently appeared in *Down in the Valley*, An Anthology.

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BEYOND THE BLUE

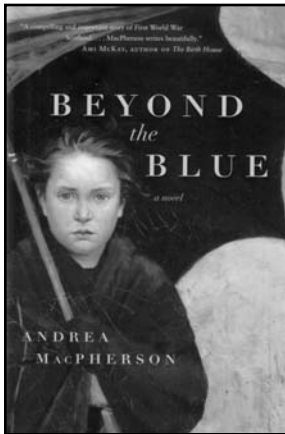
Linda Rogers

MacPherson's second novel is a family story so close to the bone we can feel the winter chill of Dundee, Scotland, in the final year of World War 1. All the men have left to live and die in the trenches at Vimy and Ypres. Those who come home will be shadows of their former selves, their youth and optimism stolen, their lungs weakened by gas and assaulted by tuberculosis. The women will continue to carry the burden.

Dundee is a seaport, where jute from India is transformed into rope to service the Great Britain's extensive merchant marine. Blue gray is the colour of the sky and the sea and the eyes through which this story is seen. It is the colour of the ribbon in a child's hair the day her mother hangs herself from a rope because her father has yielded to the siren call of romance, the India from whence all the misery comes.

Rope-making is a crushing existence. In the first chapter of the book, a young woman dies on the terrible prongs of a carder. All the women who work in the factory abandoned by men in search of validation have shredded hands and lungs. The fiber is insidious. Their only relief is the transient bliss of falling in love and endless cups of tea.

The women who live this astonishingly well-written story are members of a family. Morag, the Biblical mother, a war widow, her daughters Caro and Wallis and her



Beyond the Blue
Andrea MacPherson,
Random House, 2007,
\$29.95 hardcover,
346 pages

niece Imogen, whose fragile mother has hung herself with the very rope that provides their livelihood.

The rope would kill everyone, body and soul. The beautiful relief of this story is that the daughters will seek the magical options of their imaginings, the green of Ireland, the spices of India.

As the women of Dundee suffocate from lung disease and grief, there are glimmers of hope. In spite of every evidence of misogyny - desertion, domestic abuse and the shameful exploitation of dreams by men with sexual and economic power, they persevere in believing that there will be salvation. For Morag, hope lives in the promises of a snake oil salesman; for her daughter Wallis, it lies across the Irish sea, beyond the blue, where the exoticism of a Catholic man causes her to put one foot in front of the other; for Caro, it is the possibility of using her beauty to transform men; and for Imogen, a possible indigo child, it is the redemption of her father.

Sadly, these women all believe that the hard curves of a man's body are a safe harbour when they are their own strength, their own definition of perfect love. Giving shelter to one another inside the sacred tents of their let-down hair, they give meaning to the persistent perseverance of dreams.

Their braids, soft, yielding and feminine, are the antithesis of the ropes that destroy their bodies but not their spirits. Even Imogen is courageous in choosing her own death. In his novel *Snow*, the Turkish novelist Panuk describes the Muslim suicide girls as taking hold of their lives as opposed to taking them. Both Imogen and her sister Morag, die with dignity, the same rope around their necks.

Their daughters will unbraid the mysteries and move on to better lives. In spite of nearly unrelenting fog, we know it.

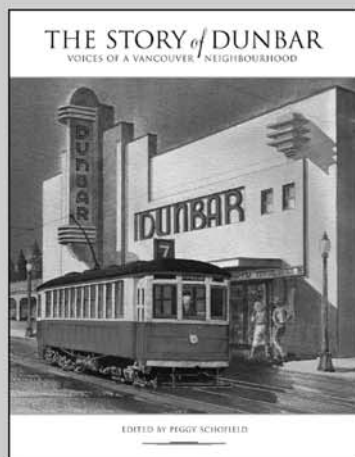


Andrea MacPherson

Linda Rogers new novel is *The Empress Letters* from *Cormorant Books*.

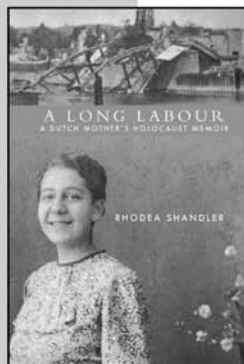
The Story of Dunbar Voices of a Vancouver Neighbourhood

Edited by Peggy Schofield



Eleven members of the community of Dunbar recount the history of one of Vancouver's favourite "streetcar neighbourhoods," with chapters on the Musqueam First Nation, early settlers, sports, transportation, the schools, the arts and much more. Based on personal interviews and illustrated with more than 250 black and white photos, *The Story of Dunbar* reminds us that history occurs in the streets of quiet out-of-the-way neighbourhoods as surely as on battlefields.

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A Long Labour A Dutch Mother's Holocaust Memoir

■ Rhodea Shandler ■ Afterword by Lillian Kremer

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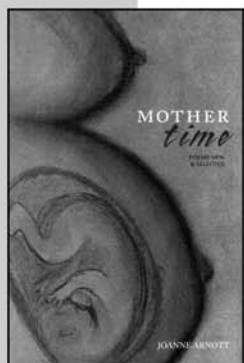


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YOGA POEMS: LINES TO UNFOLD BY

Christina Morita Clancy

In this beautifully written book, Leza Lowitz seeks to share the inner landscape of her yoga journey and to inspire others to take this same journey from individuation to unity. She accomplishes this by capturing the spirit of yoga with strong images and simple free verse firmly grounded in the experience of practice in mind, body and spirit.

Lowitz hangs her poems on a frame work of Patanjali's eight limbs—eight essential steps on the yogi's path—in order to place her writings into the larger tradition of yoga, to acknowledge teachers and the tradition itself, and to call the reader to the value of these practices. I find, however, that Lowitz' poetry resonates more profoundly when viewed as an understanding of the transformation from personal to spiritual consciousness. Her recollection of struggle and acceptance, her journey from the finite to the infinite, and her experience of surrender and bliss become mirrors of our own steps along the path to enlightenment. These writings speak of experience and reflect Ashtanga guru Pattabhi Jois' testament that "Yoga is 99% practice and 1% theory." It is through revealing experience, not relaying theory, that the book achieves success.

The first selection of poems is largely bounded in the individual: Lowitz' own struggles, experiences and reflections. Although personal, the poems will resound within the hearts of many who practice and teach yoga, for who among us has not struggled within the limits of our bodies and minds and then rejoiced when freedom is finally experienced?

In 'Adho Mukha Svanasana / Downward-Facing Dog,' Lowitz is faced with the pain and intensity of looking into oft ignored places.

*cordoned off
by years and bones...*

*my joints crack out
their resistance-*

*places I've ached
undetected*

*for a quarter of a century
send out their muted frequencies..."*

She calls upon the strength of spirit that rides upon the breath and stays with the experience to find the grace of self acceptance and release, a personal victory.

*"...So once again
I go down deeper*

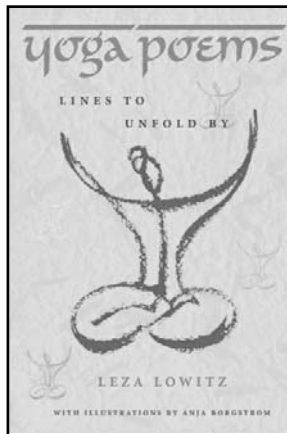
*to where
the muscles pull*

*the tendons throb
the pain travels*

*its clandestine escape
and then retreats*

*in the halfway reach
where each breath*

*razes another
skyscraper I've aspired to,*



Yoga Poems: Lines to Unfold By.

Leza Lowitz. Stone Bridge Press, 128 pp.

*brings the earth up
a little lighter between my toes.*

This is not the yoga of the hip and trendy, but the yoga of a true seeker—an ordinary woman who has discovered Self through movement, and has found acceptance and grace through allowing her body and soul to unfold with yoga. Named after yoga postures and breath work, Lowitz' poems capture the spirit of yoga again and again. In 'Sutra Hasta Majorasana / Threading the Needle', simple yet powerful metaphor reveals the essence of the pose in body, mind and consciousness:

*...untangling a knot
that is my life
the knot becomes my teacher.....*

*The needle that is sharp
at dawn
might be broken by dusk...*

*I thread the needle
honoring the odds
steadying my arms
softening by breath
working the knot,
trusting.*

Any reader will recognize the moment when challenges are viewed as an opportunity to learn and grow. A yoga practitioner will recall the pose and know that each moment on the yoga mat is a metaphor for life. Lowitz's words inspire us to embrace each posture as an opportunity to remain mindful of each moment, to learn and grow, and to cultivate faith.

Christine Morita Clancy teaches hatha yoga at Cove Yoga in North Vancouver, BC. A practitioner for almost twenty years, currently she is primary faculty with the SOYA Yoga teacher training program.

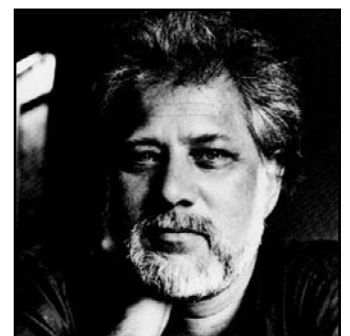
ONDAATJE (continued from page 3)

Abruptly, the Altmanesque novel moves to France where the re-constituted Anna is researching the life of the dead poet Lucien Segura, whose life experiences parallel her own. We must intuit the steps that have brought her to this symbiotic study. As past becomes present, we assume that she is finding herself in him. They are after all, passengers on the same leaky iceberg and redemption comes in the ways they reveal one another.

This is impressionistic writing, with its revelatory moments layered or laid down side by side the way cards are dealt on a table, or photographs are spread out so that life happens frame by frame. Divisadero is about the ways in which we seek family. We pick up the cards and see what we have in our hands.

One of the profound realizations of age and experience is that there is rarely a "One." Human beings are not Canada Geese, who mate for life. What we seek in one another is kindness and the possibility of fitting solace with need, the phenomenal reality of our existence with the idea of love. We are all islands of ice in the same ocean, and as they say, "There are many fish in the sea." Ondaatje does not resort to engines of triteness but he does, in his card games, rides on willful horses and philosophic and literary references, take us to the conclusive language that his characters are unable to articulate. They are only human and their job is to connect and survive to the end of their lives or the world, whichever comes first.

Linda Rogers new novel is The Empress Letters from Cormorant Books.



MATTERS OF LIFE & DEATH

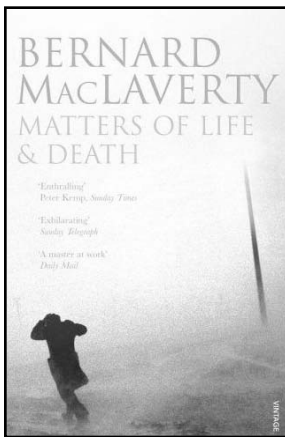
Len Gasparini

Bernard MacLavery is an Irish Catholic novelist and short story writer who moved to Scotland in the mid-1970s to escape the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland. A few years ago I chanced upon a book of his short stories in a public library. I've been a fan of his work ever since.

Matters of Life & Death is MacLavery's fifth story collection. (He has also published four novels.) The eleven stories in this book deal with—well, “matters of life and death,” or, more specifically, the human condition in times of loss, hope, fear, joy and despair. His characters in varying degrees are middle or lower class—from Norman Rockwell types to petty criminals—and he catches their actions, speech, and peculiarities perfectly. The immediacy of his narrative skill is often startling.

In the opening story, “On the Roundabout,” a law-abiding family witnesses an act of roadside brutality while driving into Belfast during evening rush hour. The incident thrusts the driver of the car into the role of anonymous Good Samaritan, which later ironically lands him in court. By way of juxtaposition, MacLavery follows up this with the droll mischief of “The Trojan Sofa,” in which a father-son-uncle team exhibits classic ingenuity in burgling houses.

Other stories chart the inevitable vicissitudes of growing old, with its attendant ailments, regrets, loneliness, nostalgia, fatalism, prescription drugs, etc. In “The Clinic,” MacLavery empathizes with the “grumpy, gray-haired, overweight” man reading Chekhov in the waiting room of a Diabetic Clinic. It is a poignant, atmospheric mood piece. As well, “The Assessment” tells of an Alzheimer-stricken woman who, in rare moments of lucidity, wishes she were in her own house instead of in a nursing home.



Matters of Life & Death
Bernard MacLavery
Vintage
232 pages, \$37.95

There is a wise sadness in the author's understanding of the terrifying ordeal of being human, the curse that dooms his characters to live in an eternally irreconcilable dichotomy between the individual and the herd animal in them. He knows they can't get along without one another and are unhappy alone, yet they hate the crowd, hate the others, and consequently suffer from being imprisoned in the cage of the self, unable to escape, unable to reach the other, unable to find salvation from themselves.

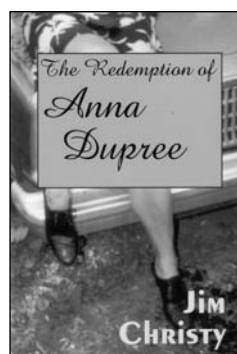


Bernard MacLavery

Perhaps the most ambitious story in this collection is “Up the Coast.” It is novella-length, and relates the harrowing experience of a landscape painter who travels alone to a remote peninsula on Scotland's northwest coast. The painter, a woman and recent graduate of an Edinburgh art college, with only a stray cat for company, basks in the wild beauty and solitude of her surroundings. But unbeknownst to her, some nameless, foulmouthed, unemployed fisherman decides to intrude on her idyllic space. What follows is a suspenseful cat-and-mouse encounter that culminates in the woman's rape and her eventual revenge on the aggressor. The narrative is dramatically paced by flashbacks and the painter's diary jottings. The story is a nail-biter; its plot reminded me of an eerily similar tale by the Scottish writer Robert Dodds.

Although the stories in *Matters of Life & Death* aren't nearly as ironic and frisky as those in MacLavery's previous collections, they possess a mature insightful vision, a concern with the ultimate paradoxes of life, with the way these forces affect our literature, and the flaws and glories of our own humanity. In a word, they are Chekhovian.

Len Gasparini is the author of The Broken World: Poems 1967-1998 (Guernica Editions), and the story collections: Blind Spot and A Demon in My View. His third story collection, The Undertaker's Wife, will be published this year.



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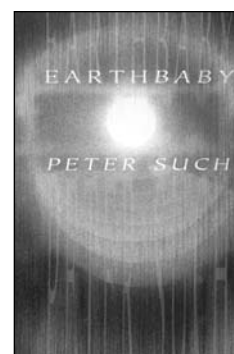
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Jim Christy is a writer, artist and tireless traveller. The author of twenty books, including poetry, short stories, novels, travel and biography, Christy has been praised by writers as diverse as Charles Bukowski and Sparkle Hayter. His travels have taken him from the Yukon to the Amazon, Greenland to Cambodia. He has covered wars and exhibited his art internationally. Raised in inner-city Philadelphia, he moved to Toronto when he was twenty-three years old and became a Canadian citizen at the first opportunity. He currently makes his home on BC's Sunshine Coast.

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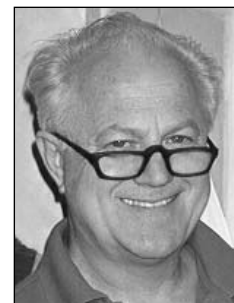
Earthbaby

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Peter Such was born in England and came as a youngster to Canada in 1953. He was a working class member of “the group that revitalized Canadian Literature in the '70s...no one in Canadian Literature is as eclectic as Peter Such” (*Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*). He is also a founder/publisher of *Impulse* magazine and a former editor of *Books in Canada*. After many years of working in other genres he completed his new novel, *Earthbaby*, while living in Finland, courtesy of an award from the Finnish Academy.

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ONE MUDDY HAND

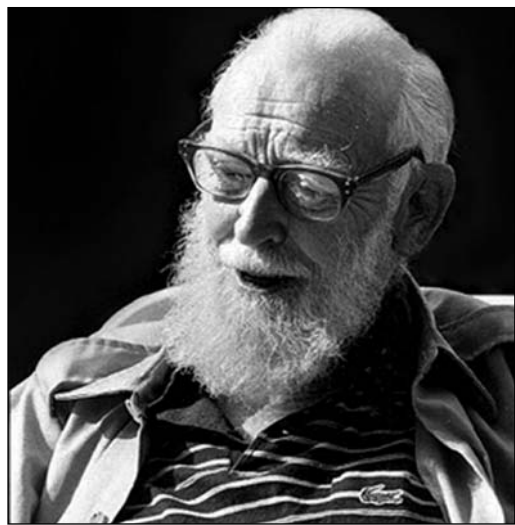
Allan Brown

I first encountered Earle's poetry at a reading he gave in 1953 and have read/listened to it off and on in one form or another for the last 54 years. This well-produced volume (the title is taken from the 1986 self-elegy "Ave atque vale") provides a chance to review some familiar texts and recount some of the changes they incorporate.

Earle thought of both the writing and reading of poetry as on-going activities, almost as a kind of continuous aesthetic teasing, touch and separation; "the art," as he put it in the Preface to *Selected Poems 1944-1966* "of indefinitely delayed communication, infinite ambiguity." As he also asserted in the CBC Massey Lectures: "Living art, like anything else, stays alive only by changing" (*The Creative Writer*, 1966).

One Muddy Hand presents 123 poems, composed between 1926 and 1987. Eighty-three of these are taken from the popular 1977 selection *Ghost in the Wheels*, and a substantial thirty from *Last Makings* (1991). For readers familiar with the shape and heft of the earlier volumes, *One Muddy Hand* has the feel of two books in one — a kind of double-layered poemcake, as Earle might have put it. Sam Solecki has added ten other pieces (the trimmings for the cake) from various stages of Earle's writing; the earliest, "North of Superior," is available in the *Selected Poems*, the latest is the rambunctious "In Purdy's Ameliasburg (first visit)," from *rag & bone shop* (1971).

The new volume presents six prose selections from *The Creative Writer* and *The Cow Jumped over the Moon* (1972), as "Earle Birney on Poetry." Earle's general comments on art are always worth reading, especially the two "Why Poetry?" excerpts from *The Creative Writer*; but, it seems to me, his defence/ explication of "David" (from *Cow*) is hardly of much interest any more. The space would be better used to reprint



Earle Birney

another general piece, such as the aesthetically precise yet bouncingly controversial "Preface" to *Selected Poems*.

A few of the early pieces omitted from *Ghost* are returned to us here — such as the vividly observed "Slug in Woods," composed at Crescent Beach, BC, in 1928, along with the tautly urbanized "Anglosaxon Street," with its memorably mocking evocation of 1942 Toronto from its "Dawndrizzle" to its "mornstar and worldview." By an interesting coincidence, 1942 was the year when Ralph Gustafson's first *Anthology of Canadian Poetry (English)* appeared, introducing

fashioned stars
to our size, ruled with manplot the velvet chaos
and signalled Aldebaran

(from *The Strait of Anian*, 1948).

The simpler form we are now familiar with ("to our size and signalled Aldebaran") was established after *Selected Poems* and maintained for the work's many reprintings.



One Muddy Hand:
Selected Poems,
Earle Birney
ed. Sam Solecki.
Harbour Publishing
2006. paper, 204 pp.

Thirty-six years and some 3,000 miles away from the Lights of Vancouver — in Toronto in 1977 — he continued his percipient movings in time, places, the play of his childhood, and his various adult fates into the arboreal word-world of "Fall by Fury."

He at once simplifies and complicates his text over the next decade or so, clambering through the stanzas as he had through the branches. He may add that quite practical item, a saw, from the scene when he "rose / through a world of web / severing dropping black treebones (1977 version) to the apparently more careful movements:

through a world of web with swede-saw
severing
dropping
the black treebones

(Last Makings).

Some changes are simple, as he watches himself first "hide in salal to watch the fox" in 1977, and then with a change of vegetation, "in the sumac to watch / the little fox" in 1991. He may also subtract more complexly from the yet vital scene (as with that "manplot"), filling and re-filling it, in shifting places and devolving personal time:

in Sri Lanka and before in my sixties
up the yellow spines of the Olgas. . .
at fifty-eight in cloud on the ribs
of Huayna Picchu. . . at thirty
inching down chalk on Lulworth cliffs (1971);

and then with a few deft gestures, a tightening here, a loosening there, he continues to exit and enter himself yet again

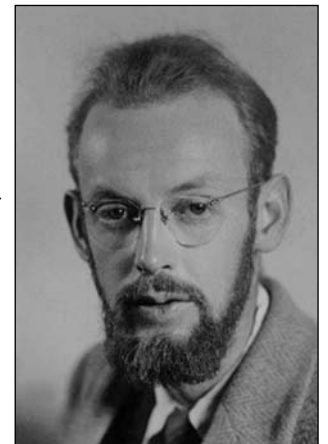
in Sri Lanka
and before in my sixties
up the yellow spines of Australia's Olgas
at fifty-eight in the cloudy Andes on the ribs
of Huayna Picchu at thirty
inching down English chalk on Lalworth cliffs
(One Muddy Hand).

After a brief glimpse at Vancouver's once velvety illumination and a more extended clamber through some of these Furious stanzas, it will be convenient to close (or perhaps to open again?) with a few words from the Salish Chief Sk-wath-kw-tlathkyootl whom we meet in the third episode of *The Damnation of Vancouver* (1952/1957). The *Muddy* version is convenient in its simplicity. The text combines seventeen parts of the Chief's dialogue, excluding some exchanges with other characters.

A bit of this material appeared in issue 38 of *Contemporary Verse*, summer 1952, where the early recollections of the Chief (here called Headman) include the striking "loon-laughter" of women, which later becomes a more obvious "squirrel-chatter." The rather abstract "invisible dust" of rocks (*Trial of a City and Other Verse*) is later simplified — or, as Earle put it, "re-vamped" — to "souls" in the *Selected Poems*. Sometimes though, the alterations may achieve too much, as the openly suggestive "one who drew frog-talk from cockle-shells" of 1952 is identified as "A shaman" in 1957 and onward.

So which of these changes and chances work best? All of them, of course, that Earle made, as well as those we can keep making for him.

Allan Brown lives in Powell River. His reviews have appeared in various Canadian journals and newspapers since 1976.



Birney in 1933, around the time of David

NOTA BENE POEMS

John Tyndall

Anyone who has read earlier books by Stephen Bett, such as *Cruise Control* and *High-Maintenance*, may think that they know all about his style of poetry. Such a reader will be familiar with his acerbic wit and his unforgiving view of all things stupidly human. His word-play and his eye for found poetry will be remembered in many inventive passages. Opening Bett's latest book, *Nota Bene Poems: A Journey*, one is in for a great surprise: the author has turned his gaze inward to chronicle an extremely painful and poignant time in his life.

After being married for decades, Bett "[w]alked out / Simple as / thud" (NB Suite 5 : No Rebounding) and walked into a period of despair and therapy. Then, like a light shining in the darkness, he fell in love with N.B., an artist and fellow traveler on the road to mental and emotional recovery: "How can you best hurt / me, tell me how much / you love me / inside a life of un- / forgivable cinders" (NB Suite 8 : Trial by Fire). The emotional honesty of the poems in the suite reminds me of such open, confessional albums of songs as John Lennon's *Plastic Ono Band* and Joni Mitchell's *Blue*. Some of the poems were composed while in residence at Magnolia House in Vancouver, a safe haven for people in need of peace and therapy.

Both of the lovers are in and out of Hell: not only the Hell of illness but also the Hell of the institution, said havens for the patients. They try to love each other among the day passes and the therapy and the wariness of two artist's souls. The love runs hot and cold, and the poet agonizes over separations and meetings: "I keep slipping on the / hardness of your face / (you've *done* the therapy)" (NB Suite 32 : Novice Climbing); and "Tomorrow it's going to be (I can / pre-write these scripts) "you dear sweet / man... I don't know what I want, what / to think, what to do"— // steering a touch / erratic / on the switch-backs / out of Hades" (NB Suite 31 : Learning Curve). All this thought of Hell allowed Bett to find the perfect mythological story upon which to hang this suite of seventy-one poems.

In Greek mythology Orpheus, son of a king and one of the Muses, was renowned for his music. He married Eurydice, who died soon afterwards from snakebite. Because of his grief, Orpheus entered the realm of the dead to rescue his beloved. His music so moved Hades, king of the underworld, that Orpheus was allowed to take Eurydice to the land of the living, but only if they refrained from looking back to the land of the dead. When Orpheus first saw the sun upon their arrival among the living, he turned to Eurydice to voice his joy and she disappeared forever.

So the poet and his lover become Orpheus and Eurydice, transported to British Columbia, where they live in and out of their private Hells. "Whether near or from afar, / says Orpheus, I will / spend the rest of / my nights & days / assuaging / all your vicious hurts" (NB Suite 63 : Assuage the Heart). "Eurydice is singin' the blues / after all the hurt I did on her // I "might" be back, she says, / by late fall, don't wait up" (NB Suite 64 : E and O Singin' the Blues). Like the way back from Hades to the land of life, the reader discovers that their path is very rocky. Many of the poems feature imagery from driving roads and highways: "Nightmare on N. Hades St, where love / nor wheels of hell 'caint' / drag her out / to that heated land of / "desires and memories"" (NB Suite 45 : Mexican Sink); "But if he can push / there, the road has a vanish- / ing point of its own // When he really gears down & / grinds it out he finds it also / has fast hills & sharp- / angled curves" (NB Suite 49 : Orpheus On the Road); and "Even while / you argued there *is* no driver's / seat in love // that's where that fast approaching / wall smacks in" (NB Suite 35 : Crashing the Wall).

After many periods of intense love and then recrimination, the suite of poems ends on a positive note: "Orpheus hands the lyre & last / verse to the woman he loved / & lost, the woman who has / miraculously returned // She is Eurydice, & her / courage & integrity lift / him to a regained / *Paradiso*—" (NB Suite 71 : The Miracle of love). *Nota Bene Poems: A Journey* is a long, strange trip for the lovers and for the readers who will witness their story. Stephen Bett's poems really dig in to remain with you after you close the book. As for the happy ending for Eurydice and Orpheus, remember what sadness the mythology held in store for them. Both of them.

John Tyndall is a poet who lives in London, Ontario with his wife and son. His latest collection of poems is entitled Free Rein (published in 2001 by Black Moss Press).

CALIBAN (continued from page 14)

Truth to follow. Our genealogy isn't presented as a kind of Judeo-Christian road to the Last Judgment. We aren't sucked us into a post-modernist swamp where all things are equal. Reading our historical heritage more closely empowers us to develop perspectives based on values; without forcing on us any resentment towards a Demiurg, globalized or otherwise, who might control our futures as he has controlled our past.

Stephen Snelders is a Dutch historian who focuses on social transformation and resistance. His most recent book is The Devil's Anarchy (Autonomedia 2005). He lives in Amsterdam.



Nota Bene Poems: A Journey
Stephen Bett
Ekstasis Editions, 2005
ISBN 1-894800-65-6
\$18.95

WHAT IS IT ABOUT WEST COAST WOMEN AND FICTION?



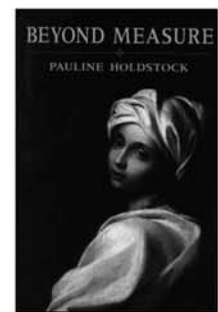
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Sure. The world needs more Canada. But
Canada needs more B.C. writers.



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ROETHKE (continued from page 3)

a numinous haze, a close and yet far quality: but what do woman see?" In counterpoint to the rest, these two quotes might have sprung an incandescent poem. The best that Roethke did in this line of formalist celebration is the much-anthologized, "I Knew a Woman Lovely in Her Bones." He developed two modes of writing, for his erotic poems (as here), a formal lyricism, for the other, chiefly nature poems, loose, open rythms, close observation, not unlike the free' aspect of D.H.lawrence's poetry:

*It's true enough I come from an ape, and at least twice a day return,
Chasing my tail, dizzy with intuition....*

A quatrain from "Straw from the Fire" (1953 -1962) is instructive fun:

*O Mother Mary, and what do I mean,
That poet's fallen into the latrine -
And no amount of grace or art
Can change what happens after that.*

First, and tongue in cheek (I guess that's where it was!) the obvious culminant rhyme is avoided, although 'flat' would begin to do it. Second, we are reminded how much Roethke was influenced by nursery rhymes and traditional jingles which throughout his work are put neatly, often humourously, into service. Third, Roethke is one of those poets who can with aplomb combine reverence with humour. At times too he can rise to a Jacobean sense of the world's raggedness:

*It's a day for a wild dog. Don't speak of it.
This light leaves me behind.*

or:

*Fish mouths nudging against walls.
Moths hanging on harsh light.*

Sometimes he brings together his themes of woman and nature:

*She moved, gentle as a waking bird,
Deep from her sleep, dropping the light crumbs,
Almost Silurian, into the lap of love....*

The prose selected here bears little relation to *On the Poet and His Craft* (1965), a volume of the poet's prose edited by Ralph Mills Jr not long after Roethke's death. Some of what's here seems to express "a sacramental view of nature," some of it (as recorded) is indistinguishable from poetry, some alludes to Roethke's sense of Oneness or, alternatively, "that there are many worlds from which we are separated only by a film." Some of it is reflective on teaching: "Teacher: a capacity for enthusiasm about the obvious," or (very much in "the real world"): "Teaching goes on in spite of the administrator." Teaching for him was a way of seeing people, but not seeing too much of them! On poetry: "Basis of poetry is sensation; many poets today deny sensation, or some have no sensation: the cult of the torpid." (Rather than the torpedo?); "To mean what you say - and that's more than sincerity."

It's good to have this book available again. There's much in it of craft, some wisdom, soul-searching, the sense of a mind (and soul) at work, on its craft, on itself, on coping with the world, and digging into the soil of its sensations, the sensations of its soil.

Mike Doyle's first poetry collection A Splinter of Glass (1956) was published in New Zealand. He has lived in Victoria, BC since 1968.

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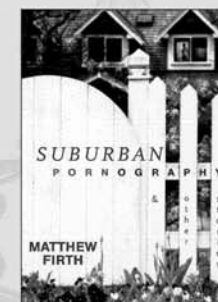


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THE LIVES OF OTHERS

Mike Doyle

Florian Henckel von Donnersmark's fine movie won Best Foreign Film Oscar in 2006. A portrayal of life in Communist East Germany in the mid-1980s, it is a grim and grimy picture, showing the lives of artists and intellectuals under constant threat of surveillance, the dire stonelike attentions of the Stasi (state police), including torture and death.

Two characters (played by Martina Grottel and Sebastian Koch), lovers who live together, are a famous actress and a well-known writer. Being on the stage, the actress comes to the attention of a corrupt government minister, who lusts after her. With the Stasi, he arranges for surveillance of their home, instructing his spies to 'find something' to help him get rid of the writer, who is in fact one of a subversive group attempting to undermine the government by exposing its venality to the West, a circumstance which broadens implications.

This minister almost immediately forces the actress to submit to having sex with him in the ministerial limousine. When she gets home afterwards she is shown cringing in the bath with the shower pouring down on her, she feels so filthy from the contact. Her lover realises what has happened and tries to persuade her to have no further contact with the minister.

Meantime, one of the two men bugging their apartment, a stiff-necked loyal apparatchik, gradually feels a growing sympathy for the couple and begins to edit and fudge his reports. Nonetheless, they are caught up in the intrigue against them, especially the actress, who after all is the immediate target. Naturally enough, she wants to save her career which is under threat, especially after she has snubbed the minister's further advances. Brought in for questioning, she begins to blow the whistle on her lover and his associates, but edits her revelations, attempting a diversion. At the last moment, she saves him, by somehow engineering the removal of incriminating materials from the apartment. By now, however, she feels both thoroughly compromised and endangered. When the Stasi turn up in force, she rushes out into the street and



Still from the feature film *The Lives of Others*

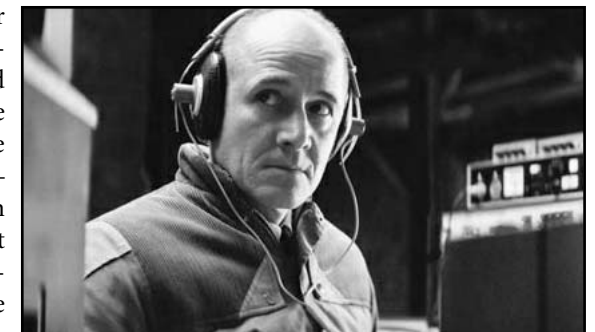
throws herself under a passing vehicle, committing suicide. This has the effect of closing the case and saving her lover, and the further effect of ruining the career of the Stasi captain who has been spying on them, and who at one point in a muted indirect way tried to warn her. He is relegated to the most menial of jobs, as a kind of sub-postman, distributing circulars.

Within five years, the Berlin Wall is torn down, the East German Communist regime discredited and ousted. The author, consulting hitherto secret files, writes a book about his experiences, dedicating it to the fallen Stasi captain, of whom he knows nothing except his 'spy number'. There's an extraordinary late scene in which he meets the minister at a theatre and

expresses his disgust and contempt for him. There follows a moment typical of the high level of acting in this film, when the minister says nothing, but looks down, pursing and moving his lips to show that he has been stung by these withering comments, but of course he is stuck with them.

An extraordinary movie, almost uniformly grim, it is the sort of movie many people do not wish to see because it is not 'entertainment'. It is catharsis. After the Second World War, some thinkers, such as Theodor Adorno and George Steiner, declared: "No poetry after Auschwitz."

Deeply understandable at the time, – and subsequently, in light of the full range of facts about the Holocaust and the Gulags, – this attitude is very much open to debate in the longer term. It implies, for example, that poetry (and by extension all the arts) is trivial by comparison. But great art is an aspect of the highest human achievement and is in contrast to the evils of Holocaust and Gulags, as good against evil. It stands against them by its very nature, and thus should be affirmed rather than repudiated.



Still from the feature film *The Lives of Others*

Related to this is the common complaint, or question: 'Why do people need to write about [or film] such things?' Then there is the related question: 'Why should I go to see such a movie, or read such grim stuff?' One part of the answer is that reading, or viewing, such stuff may lead to an understanding of it, and thus be a step towards preventing or diminishing evil in future. Admittedly, much media material is gratuitous or sensational, exploitative, but some (and this movie is a fine example) is serious and essential in helping us cleanse and maintain our humanity.

Mike Doyle's first poetry collection A Splinter of Glass (1956) was published in New Zealand. He has lived in Victoria, BC since 1968.

EARTH (continued from page 9)

"a horse in the apartment" he lives in, and with a kind of self-mocking reference, "put[s] on some russian choral music."

The bravado of the "horse" poems and a few similar fancies supplies a positive energy to the often grim autobiographical base of *Earth's Crude Gravities*. There is certainly pain here, a poignant awareness of "this bitter earth" ("all falls to earth"), of how "the work of the poet," as he explains in *Interim*, "dives into some dark pools" ("Limoncino Road"). But this multi-faceted, continuously re-asserting book also recognizes that "there is glory everywhere" and that when carefully and well observed and recorded, the dark places are often enough "windows where the saint loves alone" ("quartet in july").

Allan Brown has published more than 17 books and chapbooks, including A Penny in the Grass (Esktasis Editions). He currently lives in Powell River, BC.

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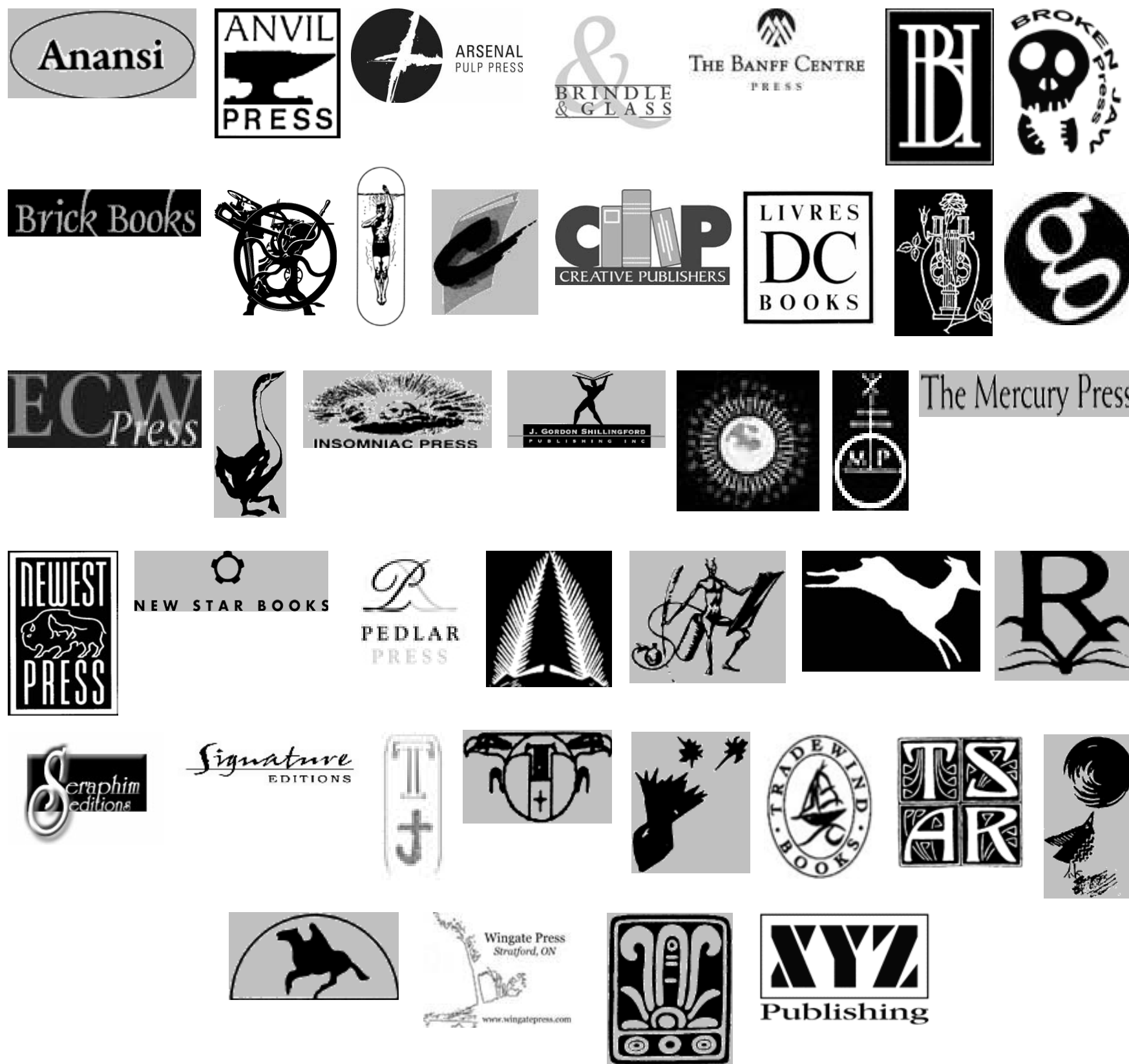
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VISIONS AND CODES: TWO NOVELS

Bernard Gastel

A mercenary fleeing a conflict in China in the near future is hired by the Russian mob to ensure the safe delivery of cargo to clients in Montreal. The cargo is a young woman. Only the clients know what she carries, and even they are not aware of its true nature. It slowly becomes evident that what the woman is transporting will irrevocably change the world, or at least humanity's part in it.

This, briefly, is the plot of *Babylon Babies*, the first novel by French science fiction writer Maurice G. Dantec translated into English. Though its science is a little dubious, the novel is eminently readable. For the bulk of its 520 pages it is a futuristic thriller set in a political climate featuring conflict, mob rule and profit-motivated espionage. The plot steams to its "inevitable" conclusion with a noir-ish fatalism that, though perhaps not as bold or dangerous as the author might wish, makes for at times captivating reading.

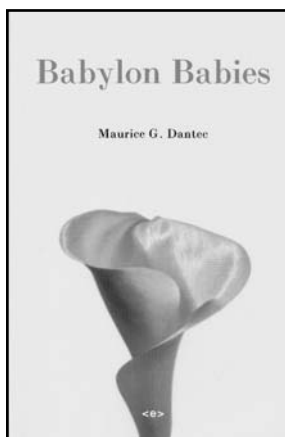
Most of the novel's faults amount to quibbles. Odd phrasing in the text and occasional poor word choice, for example, like the consistent use of "accept" for "agree" – "he accepted to go with him" – make it clear to the reader that the book is a translation. These quirks aren't fatal to the story, though they do work against the sense of reality the novel tries to create. Borrowing stylistically from Philip K. Dick and William S. Burroughs, the text is immediate and visceral in a material sense. It is also factual in a more superficial sense. On the one hand, a tortured body has many parts to explore, and, on the other, because the protagonist likes beer, Molson, Labatt's and Carling are all mentioned. The facts ground a story that in the end is trying to convey an idea, but it may go a little deeper than that.

The writer has an alter ego in the novel, a character named Boris Dantzik. Dantzik has written novel that, we are told, is coming true in its important particulars in the story currently unfolding. The implication is that the novel we hold in our hands is not so much a fiction as it is a bit of prescience on the part of the author, a vision of reality conveyed to him from the future. Of course, if all the facts aren't accurate, the prescience is a little suspect. That the Montreal Expos, long since departed in the real world, are still winning and losing games in this future is a problem in that regard.

In terms of the science in this science fiction, the idea is that every living thing is connected on the level of the basic building blocks of life, DNA, and that the next evolutionary step for humanity will make it possible to not only recognize that connection but to exploit it, actively writing new code through the introduction of viruses and uniting the world in a sort of telepathic genetic internet. This idea favours coherence over entropy, where coherence is the tendency of those building blocks of life to organize themselves in ways of increasing complexity. That this organization is a continuing process lends a sort of inevitability to succeeding stages, and also explains how the author's prescience is possible and even necessary: he has learned to tap into a future which is already being written in ourselves and in the world around us through our DNA.

In overcoming uncertainty, the novel's science is more materialistic than the traditional science it opposes, and more deterministic than the mysticism it borrows from. It also introduces a problem into the dramatic context of the novel, because while drama is about choice, the characters have to follow a particular path in order to achieve the inevitable end. Where at the climax the characters clearly have that choice, we are essentially to understand that the results are ineluctably foretold. The story, you might say, is hard wired.

If Dantec's literary forefathers are Burroughs and Dick, Zoran Zivkovic's are Italo Calvino and Stanislaw Lem. *Seven Touches of Music* is composed of seven short tales connected by a lyrical theme. In each story individuals are disturbed by visions, dreams or odd occurrences prompted by hearing music: a widower sees the family he might have had had the circumstances of his life been different; a librarian gets a glimpse of the texts in the lost library of Alexandria; a woman sees a vision of her dying sister and begins to experience the deaths of everyone she meets. Subtitled "A Mosaic Novel," *Seven Touches of Music* is not a novel in a traditional sense: the stories



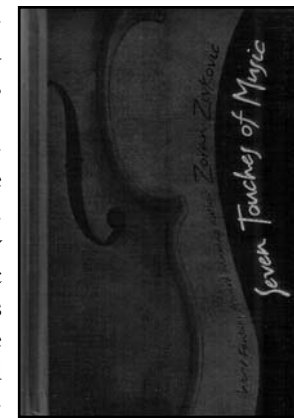
Babylon Babies.
Maurice G. Dantec.
Semiotext(e) 2005
522 pages

do not continue from one to the next with an over-arching beginning, middle and end. They are connected by a sense of loss and puzzlement, and by recurring motifs, chief among them the theme of music.

The central conceit seems to be that God is a violinist, a composer whose composition is suggestive of the entire world in its historical and future complexity. Characters are given glimpses of alternate or apparently lost parts of that composition, but, just as music described is no longer music, they do not have the means to share that glimpse with anyone else. Their impossible experiences would be considered signs of instability and nothing more. In the first story a teacher of autistic children finds that instead of filling a sheet of paper with nothing but the letter 'O' as he normally does, one of his students – apparently under the influence of music – writes a series of numbers. This series, it turns out, is a physical constant, one of the "fundamental values of nature." There is nothing the teacher can do with this information, because there is no recurrence of this anomaly. All the characters in the book are confronted with a moment of divine clarity, and their choice, when possible, is invariably to return to the comfort or banality of everyday things.

Where in *Babylon Babies* the world has a factual essence and an ultimate reality that cannot be denied, in *Seven Touches of Music* ultimate truths have a more ambiguous existence. It is exactly where those truths are revealed that loss is felt most profoundly. A short, beautiful book, it shows a world where the ideal, where it exists at all, is found in the world's shadows as well as in its light.

Bernard Gastel lives and occasionally writes in Victoria, B.C.



Seven Touches of Music.
Zoran Zivkovic.
Aio Publishing 2006
156 pages



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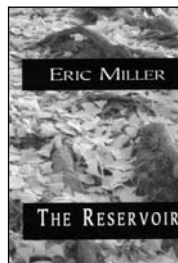
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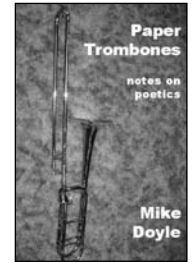
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Mike Doyle from *Paper Trombones*

Mike Doyle has lived in Victoria since 1968. His first poetry collection A Splinter of Glass (1956) was published in New Zealand; his first Canadian collection is Earth Meditations (Coach House, 1971), his latest Living Ginger (Ekstasis, 2004).



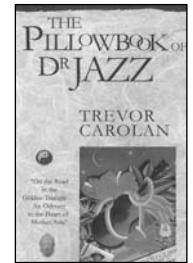
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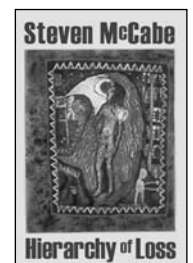
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