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Issue Seven, Fall/Winter 2007

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Diane di Prima at City Lights Bookstore

THE WAR AGAINST THE IMAGINATION

**TREVOR CAROLAN MEETS
BEAT SAGE DIANE DI PRIMA:
REVOLUTIONARY LETTERS
40 YEARS ON**

PORTRAIT OF GABRIELLE ROY

BY LINDA ROGERS

**JOSEF SKVORECKY ON
DIPLOMAT JAN DRABEK'S
HIS DOUBTFUL EXCELLENCY**

**JOSEPH HOWE AND THE BATTLE
FOR FREEDOM OF SPEECH:
HILARY TURNER REVIEWS
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**AL MACLACHLAN READS
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**LEN GASPARINI REMEMBERS
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**THE RELEVANCE OF STRINDBERG
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PLUS:

**TOWNES VAN ZANDT, LOUIS ZUKOFSKY,
GEORGE MELNYK ON FILM, VALI MYERS, THE
ASTRO BOY ESSAYS, H.H. THE DALAI LAMA,
SANJA GARIC-KOMNENIC ON PEN EXILES
AND THE WISDOM OF GARY SNYDER**

PRRB

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Image by Miles Lowry, from cover of *Ordinary Days* by Cornelia C. Hornosty available from Ekstasis Editions

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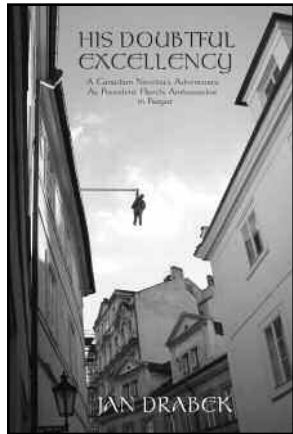
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HIS DOUBTFUL EXCELLENCY

Josef Skvorecky



His Doubtful Excellency
Jan Drabek.
Ekstasis Editions, 2007.
220 pages, \$21.95

The fate of Jan Drabek is in many respects typical of many of those from Central Europe. He was four years old when the Nazis occupied his country and his father became a notable member of the Czech resistance. In the end his father was arrested by the Gestapo and sent to Auschwitz as one of the few non-Jewish prisoners for whom the notorious ovens were waiting as well. But Drabek senior survived and after the war his ten-year old son was sent to a boarding school for orphans and children of prominent resistance members. It had been established along the lines of an English boarding schools and there Drabek met a notable group including among others, Vaclav Havel, Milos Forman and Ivan Passer.

Except that dark clouds gathered not only over the institution but over the entire country. As a non-Communist prosecuting attorney, Drabek's father, managed to bring to the gallows K.H. Frank, the Nazi leader who became notorious for ordering the eradication of the entire village of Lidice. After a Communist takeover he had to escape from the country with his two sons and

his wife. That is how, at the age of 13, young Jan arrived in the West, where the fate typical for many American writers awaited him. He studied at universities in the USA, India and Canada, paid for his studies as a labourer, waiter and dishwasher, then served for two years in the U.S. Navy. Finally he dropped anchor in Vancouver, Canada. Initially as a teacher, then after the successful publication of his novels *Whatever Happened to Wenceslas?* and *Report on the Death of Rosenkavalier*, he devoted his full time to writing. When, in 1989, European Communism came to an end in Europe, he returned to his native land.

The career of a diplomat and an unusual change in spiritual climate awaited him there: *I had grown up in the West*, says Drabek early in his account. *I really hadn't understood what half a century of totalitarianism could do to one's thinking*. In Prague he was put up in a place called The House of Hotel Living, *which resembled a hotel about as much as Alcatraz, its cell-like rooms being just as ugly, dark and uninviting*. The place required a police registration, and to his astonishment in the First District of Prague, Drabek discovered that although he had been married in a historically significant Little Church Around the Corner in New York, he was really still single. Czech law recognized only a marriage performed by civil authorities.

Naturally this was a regulation of the previous, Communist government. So was the concierge of the hotel *who had been put there many years before by the Secret Police*. *She was still there, day and night, watching who came and went, except there now was no one to report to*.

Drabek's first diplomatic assignment was that of ambassador to Kenya. It was his first trip to Africa, but his Canadian wife Joan had taught in East Africa once, so at least to her the land wasn't that strange. The imposing embassy was surrounded by a park in the middle of the city and included a movie house seating 100 people. There, the new ambassador found another reminder of the past he had not experienced. Directly above the movie house was *another extensive area now full of outdated paraphernalia for eavesdropping on the Dark Continent*.

Otherwise, the first part of Drabek's diplomatic career was relatively calm except for skirmishes during his stay in Somalia, which was part of his ambassadorial competence. The noteworthy farewell words he heard from the Kenyan representative at the United Nations Environment Agency were: *There is no crime problem in Kenya*. This reviewer was reminded of the recent optimistic statement of the Iranian Prime Minister that there are no homosexuals in Iran.



Jan Drabek meets Hillary Clinton (from His Doubtful Excellency)

Drabek was much more in his element after his return to Prague, where he was named chief of diplomatic protocol. But even in this new position he was learning that the change in 1989 was *mainly political, not much of a microeconomic one*. Notorious Communist employees of the various ministries were often replaced by young dissidents. While these newcomers were unsoiled by collaboration with the old regime, they had also been denied the usual career rise and were therefore inexperienced. They soon intermingled with the old, quite compromised officials and adopted their ways. They were simply *used to the local conditions...they knew that the present society, like the one before it, was to a large extent fuelled by such things as graft, lies and disregard for one's self-respect*. Of course, writes Drabek, *I had come across all those qualities before, but I had never operated within a system where they were considered the norm*.

Because he himself, while world-travelled, lacked experience of the strange world of diplomacy, his career was frequently accompanied by experiences more fitting for satire. It took him a while, for example, to teach his staff not to refer to the diplomatic corps as a diplomatic corpse, but at times he committed a faux pas himself. Despite intense instruction from the British ambassador, he greeted Queen Elizabeth II as *Your Royal Highness*, a title rightfully belonging to her husband. While meeting with the Turkish ambassador he praised his country's famous chocolate which, as he says, *I had loved for years*. When the ambassador was leaving, *I noticed a slightly bewildered look on his face. I attributed it to my informal approach*.

Actually, Drabek had the Turk mixed up with the Belgian ambassador.

Despite such mishaps he successfully solved countless problems in dealing with dissatisfied oriental representatives, who failed to understand why the Prague police wouldn't allow them to pollute the air with cheap used cars bought somewhere in Somalia. Or with the poor Norwegian ambassador, who suffered from vertigo and had been assigned a seat in the first row at the National Theater for a gala presentation of Smetana's opera *Libuse*. From there the view in this vertically conceived theatre is comparable to that of the balcony on the Eiffel Tower.

In the chapters dealing with Drabek's stay in Prague dozens of well-known and lesser-known personalities of world diplomacy are paraded before us, as seen through the ironic eyes of an experienced writer. Aside from the British Queen and the Swedish Royal pair (whose main wish to be photographed with the hero of the Prague dissent, Havel), there is the Canadian Governor General Romeo LeBlanc. Drabek has his

(continued on page 26)



The bohemian ambassador in Prague

THE POEM OF A LIFE: A BIOGRAPHY OF LOUIS ZUKOFSKY

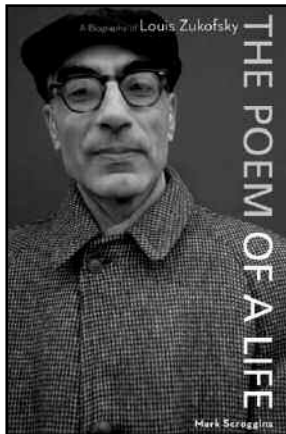
Mike Doyle

On back on this review copy (uncorrected proof), its subject is described as 'a poet who helped define the modernist movement'. Louis Zukofsky, a late modernist, was a protege of Ezra Pound and long-time close friend of William Carlos Williams. The author of this critical biography remarks that Zukofsky's 'was not a highly coloured life'. Son of Lithuanian Jewish immigrants, Zukofsky was the first of his immediate family born (in 1904) on the American continent, in Manhattan's Lower East Side, where his father worked in a sweatshop in the garment district. An older brother encouraged Louis to read literature. Eventually, he became a student at Columbia, contemporary of Lionel Trilling and Whittaker Chambers (who blew the whistle on Alger Hiss); the latter became a friend. The most significant person in Zukofsky's life was his wife, Celia Thaew Zukofsky, a trained music teacher who throughout the poet's life collaborated fully, especially in the important music elements in his poetry. They had a son, Paul, who became a prodigy of the violin. Much of this can be garnered, obliquely, it must be said, from Zukofsky's *Autobiography* (1970) published eight years before his death.

Zukofsky was also interested in history and philosophy. In the former he became a devotee of the brothers Henry and Brook Adams, in the latter of Dutch Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza, from whom Zukofsky got something of his life ethics, and something of his sense of 'mathematical' form. From Brooks Adams, Zukofsky got the triad, 'image, music, intellection' (Pound had arrived at the same triad, giving them fancy Greek names.) This triad became central to Zukofsky's intellectual life, informing the poetry. He moved towards a view of poetry as 'a design or construction' (see his book of critical essays, *Prepositions*) and in the early 1930s became the half-unwilling leader of a (perhaps non-existent!) movement, the Objectivists, which marked a brief phase in a larger over all move against romanticism. He formed a particular notion of 'sincerity', not pertaining to the personal, but to fidelity to language and concreteness, and of 'objectification', the melding of 'word' and 'thing' into 'structure'.

The provisional coloured front cover of Scroggins' book shows Zukofsky as a man buttoned-up, capped down, purse-lipped and watchful; somewhat in contrast, the frontispiece photo, black and white, side on, shows a man in the same clothes, guarded, alert, and at bay. This seems to have been one side of Zukofsky, who could be difficult to deal with. But apart from Williams and Pound, he had many friends, including contemporaneous poets and associates George Oppen, Charles Reznikoff, and Carl Rakosi. Among younger poets, his friends and disciples make a list of well known names, including, notably, Robert Creeley, Cid Corman, Robert Duncan, and Denise Levertov, people who were glad to be his followers and fellow poets.

Never a member of the Communist party, Zukofsky for a time was influenced by Marxist thought (see 'A' 8 and 9.), and by the mediaeval sense of anonymous craftsmanship (notwithstanding that he sought personal fame). Scroggins, besides proceeding through the life chronologically in discussion of the work, provides a number of crucial interchapters: on Brooks Adams; on Time and Fame; on Zukofsky's fascination with number, including numerology, and with horses; on Spinoza; on



*The Poem of a Life:
A Biography of
Louis Zukofsky*
Mark Scroggins
(New York: Shoemaker
& Hoard Publishers,
2007)



Louis Zukofsky

Shakespeare, in connection with one of Zukofsky's major works, *Bottom: On Shakespeare*; on translation (about which, particularly with regard to Catullus, Zukofsky had mimetic ideas); and on quotation, a central tactic, and strategy, of the Modernists.

A 'leading experimentalist after Pound' (Cambridge Biographical Encyclopedia), Zukofsky worked on his acknowledged masterpiece, 'A' 1-24 intermittently from 1928 to 1974.

This work, which Zukofsky calls 'a poem of a life', parallels, in scope and consequence, Pound's *Cantos* and Williams's *Paterson*. Like those works, it has a strong element of collage, prose elements, music elements, a range of forms from various poetries, poetics, personal elements, even left wing political elements (this in distinct contrast to Pound.) Unlike Pound's or Williams' 'epics', this one is

complete, its 24 parts envisaged from the outset, fundamentally based on a technique of juxtaposition (parataxis) rather than linear narrative. 'A' includes sonnets, canzoni, and various other elements of traditional metre and rhythm, notwithstanding the overall intention of creating new form, Zukofsky having declared 'prosody' as central to his project. Sections are based on baroque musical forms, on word count, on masque, and from translation (of Plautus, for example.) These and other elements combine into a unique style, which can encompass at various levels of approach and detail, the personal, the political, the aesthetic, and the linguistic. Zukofsky kept the personal to a minimum and worked towards spareness, non-figurativeness, and a complex, sometimes arcane, literalness.

Into the 1950s, Zukofsky remained relatively obscure, through a period when poetry was under the intellectual hegemony of T S Eliot, then he linked up first with Charles Olson, then (in Scroggins fascinating account) with Black Mountain poets such as Robert Duncan and Robert Creeley, the latter developing a 'warm and intense friendship' with Louis and Celia. Louis also made crucial links with Cid Corman and Jonathan Williams, who wrote of Zukofsky in the mid-1950s as 'already a warm and bemused man, but infinitely kind, patient, and responsive'. Corman and Jonathan Williams both did a great deal to 'spread the news' of Zukofsky's work, and to help him with publication. Soon two English publishers, Cape Goliard and Rapp and Carroll were publishing his work. Major figures in the reception of Modernist poetry, such as Hugh Kenner and Guy Davenport, soon took an interest. Through Celia, his thoroughgoing support and collaborator, Zukofsky's bibliography was published in 1968 by Black Sparrow Press. When Zukofsky issued his *Autobiography* in 1970 it proved to be an odd work, five short paragraphs of his prose interspersed among Celia's musical settings of 22 of his short poems. Zukofsky, above all, wanted to be remembered for the music of his poems. About this time, the Zukoskys were in London, and litterateur Edward Lucie-Smith described Louis as 'so very thin, so precise, that it seems as if a statue by Giacometti had been bred with a puff of thistle-down'.

This biography is essentially an academic work and, as such, is a good, solid, useful job. It has very good notes, perhaps rendering a bibliography redundant, but also lacks an index, which in a work of 550 pages would have had its uses!

Mike Doyle has lived in Victoria since 1968. His first poetry collection A Splinter of Glass was published in New Zealand in 1956. His most recent book is Paper Trombones: notes on poetics, in which he shares his thoughts on poetry, drawn from informal journal notes of the past thirty years.



Louis Zukofsky with his wife Celia

GABRIELLE ROY: A PASSION FOR WRITING

Linda Rogers

Tracking the photos in *Gabrielle Roy, a passion for writing*, is like watching a sunset. The sun shivers on the horizon and disappears. Sometimes there is afterglow. That is the interesting phenomenon. Roy is one of the unusual writers. She has huge afterglow.

Whenever I am about to be subjected to an interview I wonder, why would anyone care? With a few notable exceptions, people who put more of their creative energy into creating a persona than in writing, writers are pretty dull creatures. Who would want to read about us? Isn't it enough that we pour our hearts and minds into our work?

Writers are observers. We are the people on the sidelines, watching and listening while others make fools of themselves and mess up their lives. In his new book, *God is Not Great*, the not always great but frequently amusing Christopher Hitchens asserts that there is more morality to be found in one great piece of literature than all the religions in the world.

That proverb was written for artists like Roy. Her fiction is a window to the soul of a culture that died with the political influence of the Catholic Church in Canada in the last half of the Twentieth Century. The woman her settlement administrator father called "Petite Misère" was all nerve endings; every one of them absorbing the early Twentieth Century francophone reality in Canada. Her life and art are relevant to the history of our nation.

The title of this volume in a series about notable Canadians, which includes a chronology of her life and concurrent world events, a bibliography and index, is appropriate. Roy's passion for writing exceeded any other biological or social urge. The daughter of a woman who had dedicated her life to child raising, not the least to her charming and clever youngest daughter, she eschewed motherhood. She eventually rejected the married man who had guided her to literary greatness and she barely tolerated the lavender husband who alternately supported her grand passion and indulged his own. Roy lived like a man, or a male artist, prioritizing her writing once she had made her name. Perhaps that is what it took to accomplish greatness in the

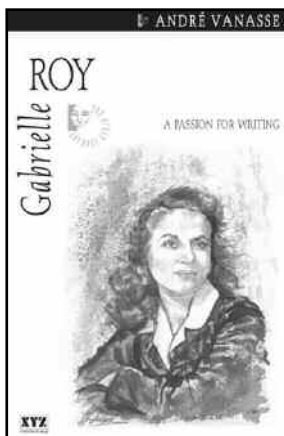


Gabrielle Roy House in St. Boniface, Manitoba. Now a Provincial Heritage Site, Roy grew up here and it was in this house, and in the St. Boniface neighbourhood, that many of the stories in her books were located.

days before Gloria Steinem. In the world of art and literature, women like author Georges Sand, who supported a huge brood and extended family with the proceeds of her writing, were a rare exception.

Roy, the youngest child in a large, blue collar St. Boniface Manitoba family, enjoyed whatever privileges were available to girls in her situation. She knew she was valued and she valued herself and her ability to create a world with words. She was a precursor to the next generation of francophone Canadian women, particularly in Quebec, who rejected the feminine stereotype of Roman Catholic women, giving up the black dresses, large families and endless bowls of pea soup for political and social freedom represented by an androgynous dress code, homo-erotic relationships and real jobs. The first Canadian woman writer to achieve international success, Roy set the standard.

Passionately devoted to writing, she used all her energy and charm to create a niche for herself that enabled the next generation of Canadian women of letters. Jack McClelland took notice and the world followed. This has become a pattern. Now Canadian writers, many of them women, command world wide attention. Just as Roy's imaginary world, the private lives of an oppressed minority, spoke for their time,



Gabrielle Roy: a passion for writing
André Vanasse, XYZ Publishing, 2007, paper, 158 pages

our particular social fabric fits itself to the great social and spiritual debates of contemporary civilization.

Like the Eighteenth century Romantics, Roy drew attention to the desperate lives of ordinary people and the small moments of grace that made their existence endurable. Her first novel, *Bonheur d'occasion*, *The Tin Flute* in English, stands up beside any great book.

The grace that is evident in her writing is not made available to readers of this slim biography, written for high school audiences. Early success may have arrested her development as a person and a writer. The empathy she had for children, which she developed in her years as a much loved schoolteacher, had been transformed into self-absorbed, arguably immature behaviour by the time she met the author. André Vanasse bases his thesis on an interview with a distracted and miserable writer past her prime.

Apart possibly from *The Road Past Altamont*, she had never inspired a critical response equal to her first book. The gap between the two books was almost twenty years, time enough to raise a child or many doubts in the mind of a childless woman writer, especially one whose family had been torn apart by bickering over her alleged exposure of their reality and lack of generosity in returning their favours.

By the time, Vanasse came knocking at her door, the passionate writer had been more or less extinguished by expectation, ambition, disappointment in love and estrangement from the family that had, at the outset, nurtured her gift. She had gambled private happiness for worldly success and she was miserable with the outcome.

So, vicariously, was her biographer, who stains his notebook with tears that obscure the clarity with which we might feel entitled to see the author under scrutiny. More memoir than biography, the book gives us a few snapshots, but no in depth study of the relationship between his subject and her fascinating miniature portraits of a culture. The photographer gets to frame the picture and Vanasse frames his with a lot of himself. He has reflected in his reaction to meeting Roy her own emotional vulnerability, the very empathy that made her finest writing so illuminating. At best, his response replicates her energy, and at worst it is intrusive.

The febrile tone of this long essay, reflects the emotional tone of Roy's final years. Agony and ecstasy are the companions of those who choose fame at the crossroads where choice is offered. As uncomfortable with notoriety as she was with intimacy, Roy ended up more or less alone. The writer came close to the flame of her despair, opening floodgates she may have closed, and when they flooded he chose to save himself by escaping from her grief, a probably wise, but selfish decision. Unhappy people are energy vampires. Still, the biographer's guilt is in the ink of this unhappy essay.

Greatness is a strange companion. Roy may have looked down and discovered she had feet of cheese. Just like the mother she didn't want to become, she stirred the pot with her foot, which may have prevented her from moving beyond the small world of her childhood. However, her soup spiced with sentiment is delicious, and it speaks for itself.

Linda Rogers is working on *The Third Day Book*, the second novel in a trilogy begun with *The Empress Letters*, and a book about a Canadian in Turkey.



Gabrielle Roy in 1955
Photo : Annette and Basil Zarov.

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THE SPACE BETWEEN A BED AND A CHAIR

Len Gasparini

In the dead of winter 1977 I traveled by Greyhound bus from Detroit, Michigan to South Bend, Indiana with two middle-aged women (one of them a poet-friend of mine) to attend a reading by Tennessee Williams at the University of Notre Dame. I wouldn't have missed his reading for the world. I considered him the greatest living playwright of the twentieth century. Hell, the greatest of any century.

It was during my freshman year in a Catholic highschool for boys that I first heard the name Tennessee Williams, in connection with a film called *Baby Doll* that was playing at a movie house in my hometown. Tennessee Williams was a catchy name; and the film, as I recall, caused quite a ruckus, like the proverbial fox in a chicken coop. The Roman Catholic Legion of Decency blacklisted *Baby Doll*. New York's Cardinal Spellman exhorted Catholic people from patronizing *Baby Doll* under pain of sin; and the Basilian priests who ran the highschool ordered all the students to sign



Tennessee Williams at the service for Dylan Thomas in 1953

a petition addressed to the manager of the moviehouse, denouncing *Baby Doll* because it corrupted Christian morals and traditional family values. I felt kind of sorry for *Baby Doll*. I was too young to see the movie but I'll never forget seeing the movie poster of it, which showed a nubile Carroll Baker in a big crib, dreamily sucking her thumb.

As the years passed, I read everything Tennessee Williams wrote. I saw every movie version of his plays...

My two companions and I had overnight reservations at The Morris Inn – a small hotel conveniently located on the Notre Dame campus. In my overnight bag was a paperback Bantam edition of Williams' *Memoirs*.

We arrived at The Morris Inn a few hours before the reading, which was scheduled that evening at Washington Hall. Since the weather was cold and drizzly, strolling around the campus was out of the question.

We fortified ourselves in the hotel's cocktail lounge, discussing Tennessee Williams. My poet-friend had learned that he was staying at The Morris Inn. I had seen Tennessee Williams once, many years ago at Detroit's Shubert Theatre, at the curtain call of *The Night of the Iguana*.

As we were leaving the hotel, I impulsively told the desk clerk I was a Canadian poet and a big fan of Tennessee Williams. I asked him to please ask Mr. Williams if it would be possible for me to say hello to him. The desk clerk smiled and said he would. I gave him my name and room number, and thought no more about it.

It was only a ten-minute walk to Washington Hall on the main quadrangle. Built in the nineteenth century, in the modern Gothic style, the flood-lit building loomed ahead through the misty dusk.

I was overwhelmed by the number of people in Washington Hall Auditorium. With a seating capacity of almost 600, there wasn't an empty seat. People sat in the aisles, leaned against walls. The place was packed to the rafters. We had good balcony seats in the middle second row. At center stage stood a table and chair. On the table a microphone, a carafe of what I assumed was white wine, and a water glass. The audience was waiting. An expectant hush when the houselights dimmed and the stage was illuminated.

Wearing a suit and tie, Tennessee Williams entered from stage left. A thunderous ovation. He walked over to the table and smiled his pleasure at the audience. The applause subsided. He poured some wine into the glass, then raised his glass in a gesture of benediction, and said: "To Our Lady." His elegant toast, with its subtle *double entendre*, brought down the house. The applause was seismic...

And then he sat down, adjusted his glasses, and opened his reading with the poem, "Old Men Go Mad at Night."

He read a number of poems, sometimes commenting briefly on them. A few I recognized: "Iron is the Winter," "Lament for the Moths," "Life Story," from his book

In the Winter of Cities. He read with a soft Southern drawl. I was hoping he'd read "Carrousel Tune" but he didn't.

It was a splendidly droll reading, lasting almost an hour. He received a standing ovation. Many of those in the audience on the main floor swarmed before the proscenium to congratulate him, to get his autograph. Telling my companions to wait for me, I scooted down the stairs and hurried headlong towards the stage. Amid the crush Williams autographed my copy of his *Memoirs*.

After the reading my companions and I took a taxi to an Italian restaurant. We had a long, leisurely dinner. We talked about well-known writers we had seen on TV talk shows: Williams, of course; Truman Capote, Gore Vidal, Normal Mailer. I remembered when David Frost asked Williams point-blank whether he was a homosexual. With a roguish smile, he answered: "Oh, I cover the waterfront."

On our return to The Morris Inn, the desk clerk called me aside. "Mr. Williams said you're welcome to see him," he said, and gave me his room number.

I was surprised, as were my companions when I told them, and delighted too. I didn't think my request would be taken seriously. I glanced at my watch. It was almost ten-thirty. *I'm going to meet Tennessee Williams*, I thought. I hurried to my room to freshen up.

I knocked on his door: three successive raps. Within a few seconds a voice inside asked: "Who is it?" I said my name. The voice said: "Ah yes, my Canadian caller." The door opened, and there stood Tennessee Williams half-smiling under his trim moustache, looking smartly casual in a

black-and-silver silk robe. I greeted him. An inscrutable expression came over his face. I had the fleeting feeling I didn't look the way he had expected me to look. He was about five-foot-six or seven. I more or less dominated the doorway. He invited me in. I told him how much I enjoyed his reading, and followed him into the room.

I was surprised to see two blond young men reclining side by side in bed, like Siamese twins on an operating table. Except for a rumpled bedsheet that covered them from their chests down, they were naked. For a moment I was distract-



Tennessee Williams in 1965

ed by their presence. Williams introduced them to me. They both sat up, and seemed amused by my visit. They were a few years younger than I – in their late twenties – both good-looking, pretty, in an androgynous way. I mean, they didn't look like bodyguards. Williams seemed sweetly fatigued yet looked in excellent shape for a man in his mid sixties. He told me to grab a chair, and asked if I wanted a glass of wine. I said yes. The TV was on, but the volume was so low you could hardly hear it. I sat in a chair near the foot of the bed. It was a strange scene, almost stagey. He poured some soave into my glass.

"To your health," I said, raising my glass of wine. He gave a nod of acknowledgement. The two young men looked on.

"Mr. Williams," I said, "I've been a fan of yours for years. I've read all your books: plays, poems, stories. It's an honour to meet you."

"Thank you," he said, and sat in a chair by the night table.

I spoke a little about myself. I told him I was a poet; I had published two books of poetry; a one-act play of mine had been produced in Montreal; and Hart Crane was my favorite poet. His eyes brightened at my mention of Crane. I knew Hart Crane was his poetic hero.

"Crane's poetry blows me away," I said.

"Hah hah," he cackled. I think he appreciated my choice of verbs.

"In fact, years ago, when I joined the U.S. Navy," I added, "I took Hart Crane's *Collected Poems* with me to boot camp."

"Well, I'm sure he would have liked that," he said.

"I've never had a fetish for uniforms," said one of the young men. Around his neck was a gold chain which he kept toying with.

"It's not the uniform, it's what's inside the uniform," the other quipped.

Williams paid them scant attention. I wondered if the two young men knew who Hart Crane was. If they did, neither one gave any indication. I also told Williams I had corresponded with John Unterecker, one of Crane's biographers. I dwelt on Crane for a while because his poetry provided a basis of mutual interest for us. I didn't want to bore him with small talk. I even mentioned I had visited New Orleans for the first time last November. He asked me what I thought of the city.

"I was there only a couple of days," I said, "so I didn't see much; only the French Quarter. I loved its old-world atmosphere, its raffish charm. I intend to go there again and stay longer."

Knowing I was a Canadian, he asked if I'd heard of Harry Rasky.

"Yes, his name's familiar," I said. (Harry Rasky was the documentary film-maker who had made a film about Tennessee Williams in 1973.) I hadn't seen the film.

As I sat there sipping wine and smoking cigarettes, I couldn't help noticing Williams' suntan. Or was he just naturally dark-complexioned. I suspected he had a bit of Negro blood in him, like a certain percentage of white people in the Deep South. At one point, I said to him that he looked more Italian than I.

"Hah hah, it must be osmosis," he drawled.

The two young men and I chuckled at the same time. Another thing I noticed was Williams' eyes: eyes that pierced deeply, like the eyes of a feline. His eyes seemed to have a history all their own; eyes that had seen much. I was reminded of Rimbaud's line: "I have seen at times what men think they have seen."

There were moments when I felt that the two young men and I were characters in a Tennessee Williams play; or three characters who had found an author but were in search of direction. There were moments when I didn't know whether to act straight or hip. I was the stranger, the straight one among them. There was no banter about my straightness. The two young men didn't camp it up. Williams was somewhat guarded in his expressions. The fact I was a stranger probably inhibited him. Had I been invited to his room because of my Italian surname? To hop into bed and make their threesome a foursome? I thought of the room as a stage set. A desk, TV, two table lamps. A picture of a sylvan landscape hung on one of the walls. A beige linen drape covered the window. Williams sat in one chair, I sat in the other. The bed, in which lounged the two mannequin-like young men, lay a few feet away from us. A seemingly intimate *mise-en-scene*. The lines of one of Williams' poems came to mind:

*Something that's delicate
and dim and rare
breathes in the space between
a bed and chair.*

I think the two young men were an inhibiting factor. Although they appeared friendly, I perceived a slight hauteur in both of them; and their carnal presence created a kind of psychological barrier between Williams and me. Would he have invited me to his room if he'd been alone? In his *Memoirs* he had written about his fear of loneliness: a loneliness that sometimes assailed him "like a wolf pack with rabies." He had written about his recourse to paid companions. The two young men? He was the world's most famous and perhaps wealthiest playwright. His private life was his own affair. I lauded his artist's credo of "life as a nothing-withholding submission of self to flame."

Of course I wondered what he was thinking. He didn't seem bored or impatient for me to leave. I was all sincerity and tact, courtly as a Southern gentleman. He asked me if I spoke Italian.



Andy Warhol (left) and Tennessee Williams (right) talking on the S.S. France in 1967

"Only a few words, some profanity, and certain idioms," I said. "I wish I could read *The Divine Comedy* in Italian."

He seemed to consider this. "I think every revival of poetry," he said, "has taken the same route, towards the language of the streets and the cadences of song or bodily movement, yuh know?"

"Hmm, yes. One of the poems you read had an Italian title: *Testa – effebo*? I know *testa* means head, but *effebo* I don't know."

"It's from a Greek word: *ephebe*: a young man in ancient Greece."

"Oh. It was very musical, like a song," I said. "I was hoping you would read 'Carrousel Tune.' I know it by heart."

He let out a cackle and said: "I wish I liked that poem. Hah!"

The golden boy wearing the gold chain yawned quietly. I glanced at my watch. It was eleven-thirty. Something on the TV screen suddenly caught Williams' attention. He rose from his chair and turned up the volume. A newscaster said: "President Carter took his oath, made his speech and then, to the astonishment of the crowds, proceeded to walk home to the White House today... the new president's jaunty amble down Pennsylvania Avenue... dramatized the tone of his inaugural address... he pledged to aid Americans in regenerating a spirit of trust..."

"Well, that's reassuring," Williams said, and switched off the TV. For a second he seemed uncertain what to do.

"I'd guess I'd better be going," I said. "I've taken up enough of your time."

"Not at all," he said kindly.

I thanked him for his hospitality. I said good night to the two young men.

Williams accompanied me to the door. I shook his hand warmly.

Later in my own room, I regretted not having kissed his hand instead of shaking it. I repeated to myself something he had said: *The human heart has no straight lines.*

Len Gasparini lives in Toronto. The author of numerous books of poetry, in 1990 he was awarded the F.G. Bressani Literary Prize for poetry. He has also published a story collection, Blind Spot, and a collection for children, I Once Had a Pet Praying Mantis.

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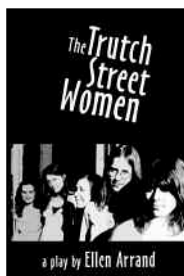
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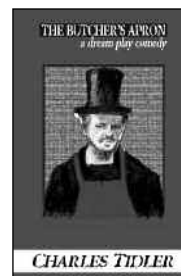
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TOWNES VAN ZANDT AND DOC POMUS: CARTOGRAPHERS OF THE HEART

Joseph Blake

Two recently published biographies of tragic American genius produce blues-like transcendence in the telling. The irrepressible songwriting brilliance of Doc Pomus shines through every page, every tall tale-like adventure depicted in Alex Halberstadt's *Lonely Avenue*. John Kruth's *To Live's To Fly* tells a less artful, no less tragically transcendent tale.

The best thing about a music biography is that a good one will send you stumbling from the story to the musician and the music. In the new books about Doc and Townes, the authors do that and more.

"Townes Van Zandt is the best songwriter in the whole world, and I'll stand on Bob Dylan's coffee table in my cowboy boots and say that," a boyish, revved up Steve Earle is quoted on Kruth's dust-jacket. Norah Jones, Nanci Griffith, Dan Rather, and Sam Shepard also pitch-in salutatory quotes for Townes and Kruth.

In truth, Kruth's writing rides the musician's drug-addled, crazy-quilt of a life a little too closely. Cluttered with so many dysfunctional, broken souls surrounding Van Zandt's convoluted story of degradation, darkness, and ultimate beauty, it could have used a tough edit to pare it down to the poetry Townes deserves. But it's not bad.

Townes Van Zandt packed a lot of hard living, loving, and songwriting into his 53 years. Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard made a big hit of Townes' *Pancho and Lefty*, and artists as diverse as Emmylou Harris, Doc Watson, Tindersticks, Mudhoney, Bob Dylan, and Cowboy Junkies covered his songs. *If I Needed You* is a carved-in-stone classic, but there were far too few hits and Van Zandt's *Waitin' 'round to Die* could have been carved into his skin as a living tombstone.

Many of his songs were beautifully written folk poetry etched with his Texas warble, a windswept, aching wistfulness that is at the edge of most of Van Zandt's early vocals. Later recorded evidence of descent and transcendence capture a darker, muted pain in his voice and gives his poetry a more powerful resonance.

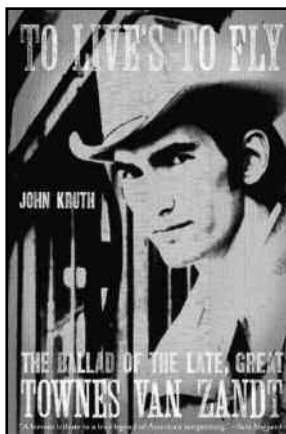
He was a wonderful guitar picker at one time too. Texas bluesmen like Mance Lipscomb and Lightnin' Hopkins were his musical heroes, and Hopkins' rambling, gambling, hard drinking lifestyle was the model for Van Zandt's career.

Codeine cough syrup, heroin, and finally alcohol grounded Townes' wild, five decades. His life was a pattern of drugs and songs, marriages and kids, and a toughness that could give Keith Richards' heralded endurance for indulgence pause.

The personal devastation described is horrific, and the passing portraits Kruth paints of Van Zandt's bawdy pals like Blaze Foley, Wrecks Bell, Cowboy Jack Clements, Guy and Susanna Clark, and his twisted manager, Kevin Eggers, to name just a few of the thumbnail sketches bobbing in the wake

of Townes' mad, broken life, well, it gets almost tiresome. Too many tangents put my teeth on edge through much of the book, but in the end it was worth it because it drove me back to Townes Van Zandt's CDs. That's a gift that makes me grateful to Kruth.

In 1991, New Orleans soul singer, Johnny Adams' recording *Johnny Adams Sings Doc Pomus: The Real Me* introduced the great, New York songwriter's mature, later



Too Live's To Fly: The Ballad of the Late, Great Townes Van Zandt
John Kruth
(DaCapo, 326 pages
hardbound \$31.50 Cdn)



Townes Van Zandt

work. Doc's *Save the Last Dance for Me*, *This Magic Moment*, *A Teenager In Love*, *Hushabye*, *Little Sister*, and *Lonely Avenue*, the Ray Charles hit that gives Alex Halberstadt the title for his biography, were the soundtrack songs of my youth. I knew Elvis, The Coasters, The Drifters, Fabian, and Ray Charles, but I didn't know the man behind the lyrics until that Johnny Adams record, and then I only knew his name.

Alex Halberstadt's powerful biography offers a richly nuanced, well documented portrait of the man and his music. In Halberstadt's capable hands, Doc Pomus' life reads like a novel. It's a beauty.

Brooklyn-bred Jerome Felder was an unlikely blues giant, but as Doc Pomus, that's exactly who he became. As a white teenager with braces and crutches supporting polio-stunted legs, Pomus belted out the blues before black audiences. Later, after a decade of hustling smoky half-empty bars and occasional triumphs like singing with Lester Young and the Duke Ellington's band, Doc remade himself as a hit-producing songsmith during R&B's glory years and rock and roll's birth.

Halberstadt describes Pomus' rags to riches to rags life story through deeply moving descriptions of the musician's loves and loneliness. Club owners, record moguls, and an array of musicians from Big Joe Turner to Little Jimmy Scott, and Dr. John to Lou Reed and John Lennon pass through his most unlikely life lived mostly in Runyenesque, New York hotel lobbies.

Rodney Dangerfield hangs out at the edges of one hotel cleaning ashtrays. Phil Spector and Bette Midler get early career lifts from Pomus' seasoned skills. Billy Crystal's club-owning father gives young Doc a similar boost.

The book's description of the immobile Pomus writing *Save the Last Dance for Me* after spending his wedding night watching his wife dance with his friends is the most poignant image from a story laced with powerful images of sadness and triumph.

Pomus finds life and riches, even a suburban lifestyle for a couple of years, but his passion and the fears that drove his creative juices burned a hole in his domestic life and pop royalty. Doc was a darker king, a king of his illness-imposed loneliness, and as his health deteriorated he gathered all his powers to write the songs on Adams' *The Real Me*. Search it out, and this book too. Highest recommendation.



Lonely Avenue: The Unlikely Life & Times of Doc Pomus
Alex Halberstadt
(DaCapo, 254 pages
hardbound \$31.50 Cdn)



From "Lonely Avenue": Pomus as a blues shouter in the 1940s

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

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READING STRINDBERG

Rachel Wyatt

When I read David French's adaptation of *Miss Julie* although I know the play well, I found myself gripped once more by the tragedy and almost holding my breath as I came to the end. By cutting some of the dialogue and modernising it here and there, French has produced a new tight and telling version of this classic drama.

A man and a woman, mistress and servant, Midsummer Eve, music and revelry in the background. It's a recipe for romance but not, in Strindberg's world, one with a happy ending. The setting is a kitchen and the third character, the cook Kristin, is serving stewed kidneys to Jean, the valet. "Miss Julie is crazy* tonight," he says. The young woman is crazy most nights. The offstage scene described by Jean in which Miss Julie made her fiancé, now unsurprisingly ex, jump over her riding crop tells much about her attitude to the male sex.

The woman is about to betray her class. More than that, she will betray herself. Her mother had made her swear she'd never be a slave to any man. And here she is, falling into the arms of a 'slave', a servant. She wants him. He tries to persuade her to go home. But in the end, after all, he is "only a man." French heightens this powerful scene with his careful attention to the choice of words.

Again in their brief escape fantasy, a hotel in Switzerland, the three of them living and working together, the writing gives the reader/audience a moment of hope. But for *Miss Julie*, alas, there is only one way out.

Strindberg's views on women are well known. He could see that more and more women were beginning to escape from their confined lives and getting 'above themselves'. Part of his despair was that there was no way to put them back in the box. But he enjoyed, he said, looking at life's 'cruel' battles. Only those able to adapt to changing circumstances would survive in this new world order. In a final bleak moment, Jean, hearing his master's bell, reverts to his place in the scheme of things. But he is the survivor who might, maybe, have a chance for a better future.

Strindberg said that theatre is the poor man's Bible; story in pictures for those who can't read. The pictures in *Miss Julie* reveal a power struggle that takes part in the woman herself. David French's adaptation has captured all of this in a way that absorbs and chills the reader and, surely, the audience.

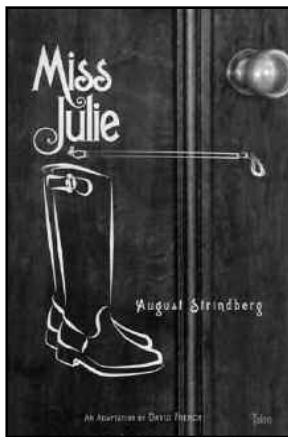
In Charles Tidler's play, *The Butcher's Apron* (Ekstasis Editions, 2006), it is Man who holds the riding crop but he is thwarted by Woman who holds a mirror up to his face. And through a labyrinth of confrontations, the play mirrors and distorts Strindbergian attitudes. Making a comedy of the Swedish playwright's works might seem almost too easy. A life so dark and plays which, like *The Father*, end in appalling tragedy, are ripe material for the less than reverent writer. But Charles Tidler has not taken the easy route.

The Butcher's Apron is a dream play like Strindberg's own *Dream Play* in which characters change shape and move in and out of scenes and time.

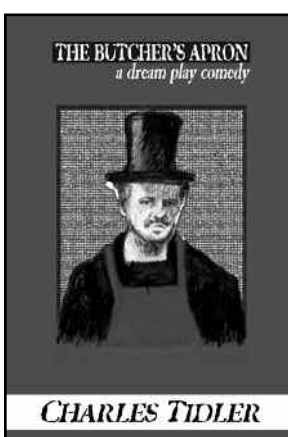
'For the dreamer there are no inconsistencies,' Strindberg said. So in *The Butcher's Apron*, two Strindbergs, Frida Uhl, his second wife, and Edvard Munch of the well-known *Scream* come and go and interact with others, with doubles of themselves, and with shadows, to take this beyond parody into an unusual and deeply funny nightmare.

*Picky Note: My old translation of *Miss Julie* uses the word 'crazy' where DF has 'wild'. I prefer 'crazy' in this context.

Writer and playwright, Rachel Wyatt was born in England in 1929 and has lived in Canada since 1957.



Miss Julie
August Strindberg,
adapted by David French
Talonbooks, 2006



The Butcher's Apron
Charles Tidler
Ekstasis Editions
2006

SUNRISE IN ARMAGEDDON

Allan Graubard

Will Alexander is a poet of distinction. His several books, both poems and essays, his command of a language as metaphorically rich as any I have encountered in English, reveal a man, now at middle age, for whom the powers of writing retain an oracular cast. Indeed, much of Alexander's work informs a sense that essential issues are at stake if only by way of the passion he brings to their evocation. That Alexander is a poet of precise meaning with a grasp of several vocabularies – from myth and alchemy to biology and astrophysics – has also gained him the respect of readers. When he invokes a relationship between the cellular structures of the body and the physics of stellar nova, for example, I, for one, accept it as a trope of the text being born and a nexus for further study. True philosophical poetry requires this kind of attentiveness, just as true philosophy does. Similarly, Alexander understands that thought, and more pertinent for us here, *presence*, resides in its expression; an immanence revealed.

Now Alexander has offered us his first anti-novel. *Sunrise in Armageddon*, over 382 pages, charts the internal strife and divinatory prowess of one Pandora, an African-American woman who escapes an abusive husband to reveal, at great cost, her re-creation as a writer. In doing so, she abandons her two daughters, her family, and every value of social identity she can. She transgresses the norms that frame our world, and the murderous horizons that history has poisoned her with: war, terrorism, political and religious tyranny, commodity worship, and the technocratic struggle to rule the planet.

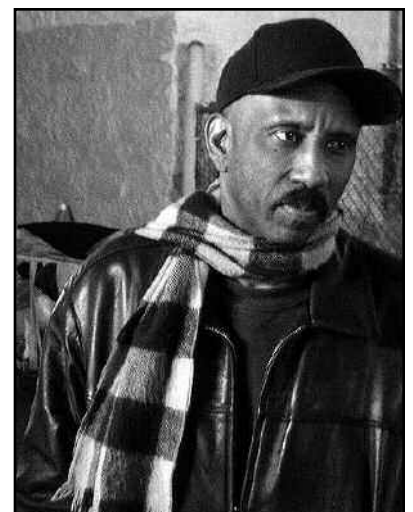
Pandora slips between the cracks. She lives in the shadows, on the streets, in hovels writing not so much to resolve the conflicts that possess and dispossess her as to ignite in each a visionary sorcery of metaphor and critique. She opens herself to the voices within her, and as they rise from her guilt, her divisiveness and her fear, she suffers her losses and celebrates her anguish. So thoroughly does she mask the world, and so clearly does she evade the hubris of that masking (even as a crucial self-reflection) that she triumphs in duplicities charged with prescience — duplicities that subvert in her what she notes in us: the subtle, insidious prevarications that gradually tie us to the quotidian.

Pandora is in flight: from herself as she was to herself as she is; from her children to their incubus refraction; from her failed marriage to her delirious, if solitary, freedom; from her family, and attachments, to an ascesis that ripens the life she seeks: precarious, effulgent, momentous; the life of a writer inspired by marvels that rise above the devastated landscapes we accept, all too much and too knowingly, as inevitable.

Have we met Pandora? In part, yes; we know something of this woman whose fugitive acrimony brings down upon her the Eryines of judgment, and because of which she incites a confession that exhausts the book. Do we wish to know more of her? That is a question I cannot answer. For Pandora, with all her poetic thaumaturgy, cannot release herself from the dangers she faces as a woman; a woman half real, half imagined. Curiously, she has little means of transforming her anguish beyond the metaphoric labyrinths she fires, save in the levitations of exhaustion. And her abyssal conjurations, where love, it seems, rarely enters, refer us to those who precede her: the Sumerian goddess Ereshkigal, the Oracle of Dodona, a Gnostic priestess of the elite Pneumatikos, a Stryga who drifts through time and place.



Sunrise in Armageddon
Will Alexander,
Spuyten Duyvil,
382 pages. \$15.95



Will Alexander

(continued on page 31)

RECLAIMING THE MOTHER TONGUE

Sanja Garic-Komnencic



Speaking in Tongues: PEN Canada Writers in Exile.
Edited by Maggie Helwig
Banff Centre Press.

A collection of essays focusing on the concept of translation, *Speaking in Tongues: PEN Canada Writers in Exile* is a unique contribution to universal experience. Twelve writers from four continents, in forced or voluntary exile in Canada, relate their experiences of the loss of language. Their testimonies and reflections, however, reach beyond language and, for many, become accounts of loss of self or of discovery of identities painfully awakened in a new place. The writers share the feeling of being stripped of meaning (Zdenka Acin), even “raped” (Fareshteh Molavi), or, to use Eva Hoffman’s expression, “lost in translation.” What is preserved in writing when melodies, rhythms, and sounds of words are left home, and the bare content is forced into different molds that do not perfectly match the content? Can writing ever be as beautiful and meaningful if deprived of its original form? Can its essence be only content? The twelve authors grapple with these questions, each offering a unique perspective.

Benjamin Santamaria Ochoa presents a universal history of mistranslations, from the Mayan word Amerricua, stolen by Alberigo Vespucci, to the Aztecs mistranslation of their own “divine patriarch’s” teaching to “offer the essence and flow of life,” which they took literally and “bled their ears penises, and tongues,” to Santamaria’s own inability to translate his feelings of helplessness in his broken English, so in his Toronto winter his words sound emptier than silence.

Unable to explain even to herself how it happened that her life changed in a day, Stella Lee questions the very possibility of translating experience. After a Sunday afternoon spent on the beach with her husband and daughter becomes a distant memory

erased by the brutal interference of the Chinese State Security Bureau, who arrests her husband for “a counterrevolutionary crime,” Stella discovers that no words can possibly relate her experience.

Similarly, the conundrum of whether we can ever really communicate across borders becomes a running gag in George Bwanika Serenma’s play “Napoleon of the Nile.” An imaginary dialogue between a Sudanese refugee stranded in Ethiopia and the President of the United States illustrates that we not only are unable to communicate but also have conflicting interests.

Conflicting interests are also manifested in the “ways of translating visa terms from one culture’s English to another’s.” Senthilnathan Ratnasabapathy, a Sri Lankan journalist, finds the root of these mistranslations lies in the racism and irrationality of Canadian immigration officers.

Struggling to hold on to her own meaning, Martha Kumsa resists being dissolved and mistranslated. Having escaped Ethiopian prison, she finds herself imprisoned by Immigration Canada, who refuses to “set her soul free” and mistranslates her husband’s struggle against Ethiopian state criminals into terrorism. Finding power in Mother Earth and in her roots, Martha discovers new strength and is able to turn grief “into bottles of healing fragrance.” In the same manner, Mehri Yalfani is vehement in defending her need to preserve her mother tongue, Farsi, and refuses the advice of her landlord “to forget about her first language.”

Each author’s experience is unique in its local colours and in variations of pain

(continued on page 13)



Goran Simic, a writer in exile still seeking the “universal meaning of language”

AT THE SAME TIME: ESSAYS & SPEECHES

Michael Hsu



At the Same Time: Essays & Speeches
Susan Sontag
trade cloth \$23.00
Farrar Straus Giroux

Deconstructing Susan is a daunting exercise. The first lady of American letters was also an extraordinary political polemicist, novelist and philosopher of photography and aesthetics. Her life-long achievement, sampled in these posthumous writings, is much larger than the sum of its parts.

In *At the Same Time: Essays & Speeches*, as well as her previous collections of essays, Sontag championed the lesser known, and principally non-English speaking, novelists and artists. A number of Russians are introduced: Victor Serge, a serial revolutionary and ex-friend of Trotsky (aren’t they all), was the author of first Gulag novel, *Midnight in the Century*, well before the time of Solzhenitsyn. Sontag revived Wallace Stevens’s “magisterial” poem, “Esthetique du mal,” that was directly inspired by Serge and where Stevens summed up: “Revolution is the affair of logical lunatics/the politics of emotion must appear to be an intellectual structure.”

Leonid Tsytkin was another contrarian Russian who “re-imagined” Dostoyevsky in his *Summer in Baden-Baden*. It was a dream novel, Sontag explains, in

which “the dreamer, who is Tsytkin himself, conjures up his own life and that of Dostoyevsky in a streaming, passionate narration.” The irony, of course, is that “loving Dostoyevsky, what is one to do — what is a Jew to do — with the knowledge that he hated Jews?” While Tsytkin suffered a loss of words explaining his admiration of the



man “who did not even refer to the Jews as a people, but as a tribe,” Sontag says that such fervor reminds us “that the German worship of Goethe and Schiller was in large part a Jewish affair, right up to the time German started murdering its Jews. Loving Dostoyevsky means loving literature.”

This is the same love that Sontag engages in a discourse on beauty and language in these last essays. Her initial reference on the illusive subject is a response from the late Pope John Paul II on the cover-ups of sexually predatory priests. The Pope said, “a great work of art may be blemished, but its beauty remains, and this is a truth which any intellectually honest critic will recognize.” Her other example as well defines “beauty” in metaphors. Beauty is a judgment to make sense of one’s energies, affinities, and spirit, she underscores, “and the usurping notions appear ludicrous. Imagine saying, ‘That sunset is interesting.’”

The title essay, “At the Same Time,” is an eloquent, powerful take on Kantian philosophy (“time exists in order that everything doesn’t happen all at once... and space exists so that it doesn’t all happen to you”) with respect to the writer’s responsibility. Today, when communicative reaches through the computer and Internet have reduced Kantian categories of space and time to relativism, novelists still must “perform their necessary ethical task based on their right to a stipulated shrinking of the world as it really is,” Sontag says. “It is the novelist’s job to keep in mind the spurious cultural

(continued on page 11)

SONTAG (continued from page 10)

geography that is being installed at the beginning of the twenty-first century.”

Contrasting beauty and integrity with their opposite, the infamous Abu Ghraib photographs, writes Sontag in the essay “Regarding the Torture of Others,” provide “the horror of what is shown in the photographs cannot be separated from the horror that the photographs were taken.” As with Southern lynching pictures of the 1930s or Germans’ snapshots of their Holocaust victims in World War II, the U.S. soldier pictures “were souvenirs of a collective action whose participants felt perfectly justified in what they have done,” especially when photographs can be easily downloaded by digital cameras, imitating Internet pornography that is “now being normalized, by the apostles of the new, bellicose, imperial America, as high-spirited prankishness or venting.”



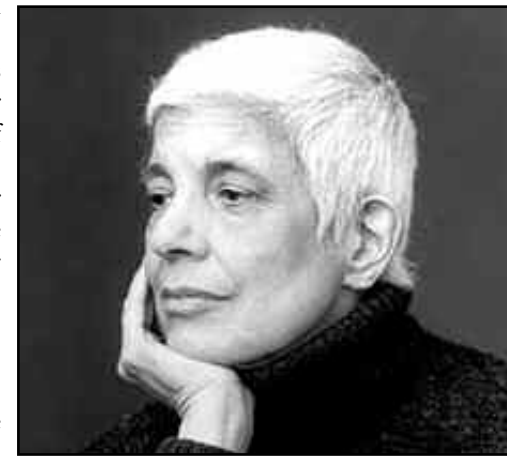
Susan Sontag

It is simply sad that in Sontag’s last years, when she was fighting against acute leukemia, she had to engage against the obscenities of what she called the “phantom,” thus, “endless” war on terror “waged at the pleasure of the Bush administration.” Much comments have been made of her three statements as a successively moderating protest against the reckless venture of “a robotic president who assures us that America still stands tall,” she wrote on September 24, 2001.

In her second statement, “A Few Weeks Later,” Sontag persisted to reject “September 11th” as a Pearl Harbor event or a clash of civilizations. She suggested prophetically, “if the American government persists in depicting this as a war, and satisfies the public’s lust for the large-scale bombing campaign that Bush’s rhetoric seemed to promise...the danger is likely to increase.”

In her third statement, the Bush’s war, just like the wars on cancer, poverty or drugs, has been transformed into an unending engagement. When governments declare war on cancer or poverty, “it means the government is asking that new forces be mobilized to address the problem,” she said. In the U.S. war on terror, however, “it means that the government can do what it wants. When it wants to intervene somewhere, it will. It will brook no limits on its power,” Sontag declared on the first anniversary of September 11th in 2002, a half-year before the Iraq war.

Four years onward, two years after Sontag died, the endless war steamrolls along. The merging of what she called “dangerous, lobotomizing notion” of a war on terror with U.S. militarism in the Middle East has evolved into other metaphors such as the “axis of evil,” “counter-insurgency,” “Iraq surge” and so on. From her tomb, though, Sontag should have the last word. “Real wars are not metaphors,” she wrote in 2002. “And real wars have a beginning and an end. Even the horrendous intractable conflict between Israel and Palestine will end one day. But the war that has been decreed by the Bush administration will never end. That is one sign that it is not a war, but rather, a mandate for expanding the use of American power.”



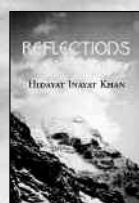
Susan Sontag by Annie Leibowitz

Michael Hsu is a senior editor of banking laws in America.

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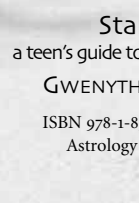
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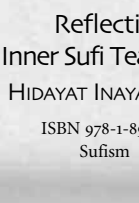
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A WILD SALAD

Dr. Nicolas Kats

June in Connecticut.

I'm visiting Dad. He is recovering fast from major surgery.

My brother Greg is here too.

Dad wants a wild salad for lunch, he loves them.

"Greg, Dad wants a wild salad. Want to look around?"

Greg is an avid forager. Not as knowledgeable as me, but truly carnivorous and a total hunter. If it moves, he'll eat it. When we forage together the synergy is incredible.

"Let's go."

I grab a bowl and we head out of the house.

First, the road into the woods. As we enter the forest there's lots of wild grape vines, Concord grapes. All end in tendrils, elegant, green and red, forked, arcing out, searching in the air for a grip that they seize within minutes. It is far too early for grapes. I contemplate the leaves. They are used for dolmades, a Greek dish of rice wrapped in grape leaf and marinated. The leaves are not really tender enough for us. The tendrils are tender and sour and add an interesting texture to any salad. When you prepare and serve the salad, be sure to pull them apart, for they wrap around everything, binding the salad into a solid unit.

We see sassafras, saplings and small trees. The wood is lousy for a fire – much too soft, low in BTUs. The leaves are distinctive - mittens with a thumb sticking out, sometimes two thumbs, sometimes none. The root bark of sassafras was cherished in Colonial times, when syphilis from the New World swept Europe. Tons were exported. I don't know if it helped. We pick the young leaves on the branch tips, pale, tender and aromatic.

Down the forest road are lots of greenbrier, *Smilax rotundifolia*. As children we cleared woods of the greenbrier, a tough job with the thorny vines entangled with everything. We didn't have a clue then that it could be eaten. We want the shoots. They are light green and elegant, with small shiny leaves and fine tendrils. The mouth feel is lovely, almost buttery. Ants love them too, and a few can be seen running up and down every shoot. We knock each shoot against something hard to dislodge the ants.

Next is a hemlock tree, *Tsuga*. Its twigs are tipped with delicate light green clusters of needles, feathery to the palate, mild to the taste. I pick a handful. This is not the poison hemlock, *Conium*, made famous in the death of Socrates. *Conium* isn't a tree, and is no relative of the forest hemlock. These names are strictly coincidental, nothing more.

We enter a field. Ahead is a stand of young locust, creamy with dense masses of flower. The locust is an amazing tree. It thrives where man disturbs the land – disused parking lots, dumps, cities. It is a real survivor. The wood is very hard, yet the tree grows far faster than any other native hardwood. Because of its denseness it is the best firewood around, superior to hickory or sugar maple. It makes the best posts – they last a century or more, far longer than the next best wood, cedar, which lasts a decade or two. Because it is rot resistant it makes a great boat building wood. The problem is that it is tough and ornery, very splintery, and with lots of silica that dulls tool edges fast. The grain is beautiful, golden and flecked, something like mahogany. What a tree! How did the locust acquire so many extreme properties? We are after the flowers. They are like pea flowers. All these fertilized flowers will turn into huge pea pods. This puts the locust in the pea family. Locust flowers are quite solid. The sun is out, and they are full of honey. We take joy in a few mouthfuls of sweetness, and break off thick clusters, to be sorted out later.



Leaves of the locust tree

Two crabapples straddling the stream. I try the leaves but they are too old. Too late in the year. We move on.

Down the field Greg points out red clover in blossom and turns an inquiring look at me. Why not? We try a couple and they are nice. Around are other clovers – white clover and the tiny yellow trefoil. All are in the genus *Trifolium*, of the pea family. Their flowers are actually a bundle of tiny pea flowers that in time will turn into miniature pea pods. You need good eyes or a magnifying glass. The clovers enrich soil by fixing nitrogen in the roots and leaving this behind when they die. Red clover is exceptional for its phytosteroids. These have a moderating effect on estrogen and are

beneficial for women with excess estrogen or a high ratio of estrogen to progesterone. Rich in nutrients, the clovers are blood-builders. Dad doesn't have to worry about estrogen, but his tongue is pale and he needs to build up his blood. We pick clover flowerheads.

HEALING/HEALTH

beneficial for women with excess estrogen or a high ratio of estrogen to progesterone. Rich in nutrients, the clovers are blood-builders. Dad doesn't have to worry about estrogen, but his tongue is pale and he needs to build up his blood. We pick clover flowerheads.

Framing the gates between one field and the next are two young linden trees, lime flower, basswood, *Tilia*. They are in bloom. The green blossom is cooling, mucilaginous, soothing, calming. It is an excellent nervine. It also makes a fine Yin



Woody nightshade berries

nourisher. Yin in Chinese medicine means moist and cooling. Yin deficiency means dry and perhaps hot as a result. The tender blossoms are very nice eaten straight up. I try one. The sepal is now too tough, but the green flowerhead, a spherical spray on a stalk, is still good. We pick handfuls of linden flowerheads.

Along the stone wall are woody nightshade vines, the deadly nightshade, bittersweet, *Solanum dulcamara*. The purple flowers with yellow centers face us, an intense stare. They resemble the flowers

of their relatives, the potato and the tomato. I've eaten the red berries of *dulcamara*, like tiny tomatoes, quite good. *Dulcamara* is poisonous, so eat few, for children none. These flowers will add an interesting dimension to the salad. We take six.

Down the stone wall are a few barberry bushes, *Berberis vulgaris*. The yellow spring flowers, now gone, are sweet. In the fall they become oval red berries, drupes with a single seed, nice to eat, and a food reserve for winter birds. Barberry is popular with herbalists. The inner bark, the part used, is tawny yellow. This yellow indicates the presence of the alkaloid berberine, a potent antibacterial, useful for infections like tonsillitis and *Helicobacter pylori*. Barberry is bitter and is a fine digestive and bile stimulant. It is appropriate for stimulating a weak digestive system, with improved absorption and excretion, or as an element of a sensible detoxification program. We want the light green leaves towards the end of the twigs, oval, tender and sour. We strip some twigs of their leaves.



Common barberry

On to the vegetable garden. The first 'weed' I spot is wood sorrel, *Oxalis*. The leaf looks like clover, but is much thinner and more delicate. It is tart. We gather some leaves, leaving behind the bitter flower buds.

Another 'weed' is purslane, *Portulacca*. The leaves are thick, succulent and mucilaginous, and very cooling. This is a particularly nutritious plant, rich in Vitamins A and E and essential fatty acids. Why do gardeners destroy it when it is healthier than anything else they grow? The mysteries of ignorance. We break off leaves and branchlets, taking care to leave the purslanes alive for another day.

On the way to the house are rose bushes. Rose petals are calming, and are great for agitated women. I take a few roses, some small and pink, and one large red.

Making the salad: The flowers are set aside. The greens are rinsed and the tendrils disentangled. I put the lot into a large wooden bowl and squeeze in the juice of an orange. That is the dressing, and that's it. A vinaigrette would overwhelm. I toss the lot and then sprinkle the flowers atop. The salad is ready, an extraordinary cascade of greens under a panoply of flowers red, pink, purple, green, cream.

We start lunch with the salad. Murmurs as the exotic cacophony of texture, color and form hits the plates.

"A top restaurant would charge \$50 for a plate."

"No, this is priceless. You can't do this commercially."

It is not possible to get this kind of thing at a restaurant. Or a supermarket. This is in an utterly different dimension.

We enjoy the exquisite elegance of the living wildness.

And that is how to make a wild salad.

American-trained, Dr. Nicolas Kats lives and practices in Clifden and Galway, Ireland.

JOYFUL WISDOM FROM THE OLD MASTER

Joseph Blake

As I return to Gary Snyder's latest book, and this review, wild fires are ranging out of control from Santa Barbara to San Diego, Already more than eight million acres in the western U.S. have been consumed by forest fires, the worst year in U.S. history with nine states breaking annual records for destruction by fire...and it is not a new phenomenon.

There has been a huge increase over the last four decades, as climate change and the rise of temperatures, humidity, and draught combined with a Forest Service policy of putting out forest fires as soon as possible produced a huge build-up of fuels. Forests choked with low brush dried out by earlier and earlier Spring growing seasons now threaten to burn at historic levels. Some experts estimate that we'll lose half of existing forests to fire.

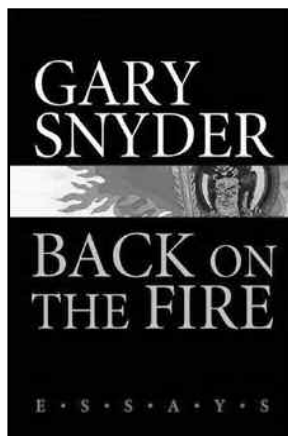
So, there is good reason for Snyder's *Back On The Fire*, his most personal collection of essays on life's transitory and transformational nature. A Pulitzer Prize-winning poet and National Book Award-winner, Snyder's vision is steeped in a lifetime living naturally and of working with nature for the long run. The book is divided into two sections. With the first set of essays, Snyder lights a series of his own small burns, the tactic he suggests will save our forests from ecological destruction. The writer has always seemed like the voice of an older, wiser brother whispering secrets as we sink into our campfire sleeping bags and the dark. These essays light counter-intuitive truths like the regenerative power of fire burning throughout the tangled darkness of what one essay describes as "the New World Disorder."

In "Ecology, Literature, and the New World Order" Snyder's thoughts range from Okinawa's role as a cultural crossroads, to this era's anti-environmentalism, ("What we refer to as nature or the 'environment' or the wild world is our endangered habitat and home, and we are its problem species. Living in it well with each other and with all other beings is our ancient challenge."), to semantic underpinnings and the order of wild nature, to the teaching and literature of Asia's past, to 'ecological imperatives' that weave together modern environmental writing, poetry, and the work of scholars with a concluding section titled 'Performance is Currency' linking Noh theatre, Zen verse, Ainu wisdom, yogic and Buddhist *askesis*, Polynesian gift economy, Gandhi's thoughts, and finally one of Snyder's poems summing up all those disparate threads with the Zen-lit lines,

*The vast wild
the house, alone.
The little house in the wild,
the wild in the house.
Both forgotten.*

No nature

Both together, one big empty house.



Back On The Fire.
Gary Snyder.
Shoemaker & Hoard,
2007.

The power and wisdom of prescribed burns and the long view they represent is repeated in myriad forms throughout the other eight essays including perhaps the brightest burning page in "Writers and the War Against Nature" where Snyder writes "One can ask what might it take to have an agriculture that does not degrade the soils, a fishery that does not deplete the ocean, a forestry that keeps watersheds and ecosystems intact, population policies that respect human sexuality and personality while holding numbers down, and energy policies that do not set off fierce little wars. These are the key questions worth our lifetimes and more."



Gary Snyder

In the second section 17 shorter campfire-whispered last thoughts follow, beginning with one titled "With Wild Surmise" where Snyder describes "Homo Sapiens year 50,000". Essays on Japan's wild women, Coyote myth, elegiac word drawings of Philip Whalen, Allen Ginsberg, and Gary's wife, Carole Koda, and his thoughts on cave art, Haiku, and the role artists play are among my favourites, but Snyder's gem-like essays are all so understated, concise and true I'm sure you'll find others that will touch you deeply.

This is a simple feast and a poetic meal seasoned with eclectic influences; and maybe, like *Earth House Hold* and other examples of Snyder's poetry-fuelled prose, too easily overlooked or to quickly read or misread. *Back On The Fire* should be a slow read. It's about taking your time and time itself, and lives passing and lives lived. The campfire is burning down, and Gary has just remembered one more thing to whisper to you. "The world is made of stories. Good stories are hard to come by, and a good story that you can honestly call your own is an incredible gift. These stories are part of a bigger story that connects us all."

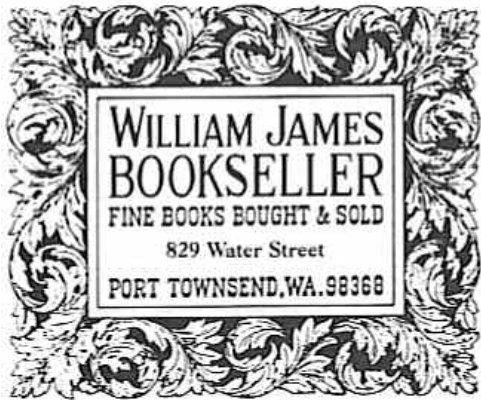
For 25 years, Joseph Blake has been Canada's grittiest music writer. A widely read travel correspondent, he lives in Victoria, B.C.

MOTHER TONGUE (continued from page 10)

inflicted on individuals by local powers. However, most of these writers find themselves in a universal trap of miscommunication regardless of time, place, or language. In besieged Sarajevo, Goran Simic lacks words to express his love and care for a small orphan boy and is hopelessly misunderstood. The boy runs away, and Goran's words, in his own language, sound empty and meaningless. Similarly, in a Toronto library, his attempt to discuss English poetry with a woman sitting across from him is seen as the leering of "an old pervert." However, he discovers that he is able to understand the woman's "language of disappointment." Like Faruk Myrtaj, who "discovered Canada through its literature," Goran, "seduced by the beauty of English literature," does not completely lose faith in the universal meaning of language.

Reza Baraheni offers examples of the translated poetry of Yadollah Jalali Pendory, Ahmad Shamlou, and Robert Desnos, illustrating that language is not necessarily lost in translation. But something else is lost: the wholeness of the poem transported to another time, another place. Every poem, regardless of origin, "exists in its whole" and its specific time and place is irreparably lost when translated into another context. How can anybody but Iranians "understand the 'repetition of Blue' alluding to 'the meaning of home (country)'" asks the author. Or "the lost symbolism of the lemon tree" in Andrea Hila's account of a risky journey from Albania to Canada? How can anybody ever truly understand the sadness at the loss of plane trees and the blue tiles of an Iranian palace? Could we ever translate the grief of having a memory triggered by a smell? Can we ever truly understand each other?

A playwright and a screenwriter with a Ph.D in film and theater semiotics, Sanja Garic-Komnenic teaches English at the University College of the Fraser Valley and in the Liberal Arts Department at B.C.I.T.



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AVANTI! THE DHARMA POETICS OF DIANE DI PRIMA

Trevor Carolan

Thursday, Oct. 11 was a good night to be in San Francisco. All around, the city's annual LitQuake Festival was in full bloom and at City Lights Books in North Beach, Diane di Prima's reading from her new edition of *Revolutionary Letters* demonstrated her working at the top of her poetic form. Warm, wry, compassionate, di Prima read from her politically charged work-in-progress that has endured through five published incarnations through 40 years. The current edition with 21 new letter-poems is published by Last Gasp Press.

di Prima began with an explanation, noting that she first read her revolutionary poems in New York from the back of a truck driven by Sam Abrams. These early poems, she said, were structured using "street form"—quick, one-shot takes that could be read on street-corners before heading off to the next location. The much anthologized "Rant From A Cool Place" is archetypal: "We are in the middle of a bloody, heartrending revolution / Called America, called the Protestant reformation, called / Western man / Called individual consciousness, meaning I need a refrigerator / and a car / And milk and meat for the kids..."

Given the violence and vengeful nature of those stormy times, mobility and poetic shape-shifting were no small thing. As di Prima reminds in Letter #8, "Everytime you pick the spot for a be-in / a demonstration, a march, a rally, you are choosing the ground / for a potential battle..." Plenty of the names who made political waves during the stormy sixties and who ended up dead are honoured in this collection. di Prima was no lightweight activist herself and *Revolutionary Letters* still kicks ass, hard. These are the rants, incantations and prophetic warnings of a bard-seer on the run, ducking and dodging her way as aesthete, mother, creative artist, and all-around dissenting American citizen who's been pissed off with the high-level hooliganism of the U.S. ruling elite since she was old enough to absorb her Italian grandfather's own revolutionary teaching.

The book's dedication offers useful perspective: "...to Bob Dylan / and to my grandfather, Domenico Mallozzi / friend of the great anarchist dreamers of his time / who read me Dante at the age of four / & named my mother after Emma Goldman."

Who with a scrap of human dignity wouldn't love *Revolutionary Letter #29?*

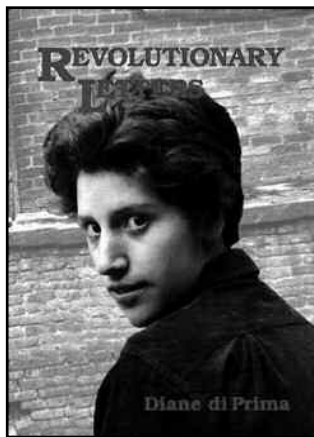
beware of those
who say we are the beautiful losers
who stand in their long hair and wait to be punished
who weep on the beaches for our isolation

we are not alone: we have brothers in all the hills
we have sisters in the jingles and in the ozarks
we even have brothers on the frozen tundra
they sit by their fires, they sing, they gather arms
they multiply : they will reclaim the earth

nowhere we can go but they are waiting for us
no exile where we will not hear welcome home
'good morning brother, let me work with you
goodmorning sister, let me
fight by your side.'

It gets wilder. Precise instructions for basic revolutionary activity; how to respond to martial force from the authorities, how to hide, set up neighbourhood action plans, what foods and provisions are needed during a siege, fundamental strategies of every underground liberation force. Given the way things have been drifting, maybe it's timely advice.

The image on this latest cover of *Revolutionary Letters* shows that memorable in-your-face Italian beauty known to the world through her eternally hip *Memoirs of a Beatnik*. But as some poems age, so do poets. di Prima's reputation as a beloved elder



Revolutionary Letters.
Diane di Prima
Last Gasp Editions, 2007.
164 pp, \$14.95

of North America's literary community is secure, but with an experiential wisdom shared by comparatively few other ranking American poets, she now projects the subdued aura and physicality of an eternally hip Queen Victoria, a poetic nobility earned through fire and *having been there*. Her later revolutionary poems may not be as volatile as earlier works, but they possess rich spiritual depth, reflecting a long evolving concern with ecological issues that entwine with even deeper yearnings for peace: "The dance of the I Ching is the dance of the star tide / Mathematics of the Zend Avesta / Geometries of Ife / The golden ikon of the Black Virgin / stands at the stone gateway of Tashkent / The flowering valleys of Shambhala / haunt our dreaming / What skeletons stalk there?" (Letter #77)

What we get is a poet who's walked the walk. There's no airy-fairy, self-conscious art-making fluff in this gutsy book, yet there is a constant sense of awareness, of poetic intent. di Prima explains that while the poems in the series were hastily composed, in the moment, "After the first three or four I saw that the poems were being written for performance," she says. And indeed there is a sense of dialogue with her audience here, like words from a wise old friend we suddenly realize we need to hear from. "You can see in 'Canticle of St. Joan' that it is not a street poem," she says. Dedicated to Robert Duncan, the alchemical four-part mystic exploration of the ecstasy of St. Joan of Arc is anything but street poetics.

Regarding her optimism and ability as an activist poet to face up to grim U.S. politics di Prima speaks with the candour of a neighbourhood big sister: "I'm hopeful because every one of us, in a Buddhist sense, is intrinsically already past all the bullshit...the wars, Iraq—I'm hopeful."

Has she ever been afraid to say anything? "Of course! Why? Because I'm afraid. Why else do you think I'd want to say these things. But as a poet you have to speak out. What have you got to lose anyway? At this point in my life I try not to get other people arrested...I'm working now on the second volume of my autobiography and I wish there were—there ought to be—a statute of limitations regarding what you can say about some things, some incidents, and some people who've affected your life."



Readers of di Prima become familiar with the Buddha dharma that runs throughout her poetry. The question of finding reconciliation, however, between the demands of the compassionate views it encourages and the anger that frequently accompanies political action is a central point of tension in her work.

"Most of the poems in *Revolutionary Poems* aren't written from anger," she clarifies. "The beauty and the joy and the possibilities of living and of celebrating life are enormous. In the same breath, you have to remember the Buddhist idea of Wrathfulness—that whatever opposes compassion is a demonic form and an incitement to become mindfully wrathful. The difference here is that when you take it all personally, when you invest ego in it, then anger can arise. I remember Allen Ginsberg in the sixties getting working up about the anti-war situation—and there was a lot to get worked up about in those times—he shouted one time 'I will personally stop the war in Vietnam!' When you take it to that level it gets pretty intense.

"You know, I was asked once after making an appearance in another city, I think it was for the Liberation News Service that used to provide news to hundreds of alternative publications throughout North America, I was asked 'What is your plan for the City of San Francisco?' I was absolutely stopped in my tracks. My plan for what? I thought, 'Well, I can tell you what my plan is for the immediate week ahead, or maybe



Diane di Prima

(continued on page 31)

STOP MAKING SENSE

THE FIRE: COLLECTED ESSAYS OF ROBIN BLASER

Peter Grant

We are reminded at the outset of “The Fire” of “the processional aspect of the world”—the ineluctable Present where everyone lives and everything happens. This reality informs Robin Blaser’s entire work and bears directly on his practice of “open” writing. The writer is now in his sixth decade of work as a poet with a distinctive collage style that is *le dernier cri*. In poem and prose he confronts the paradox that writing fixes experience to words and stops it cold. To express truly the processional world a poem sustains the sense if not the fact of its flux. *Voilà — the fire*. Blaser has much to say about this relationship; a plurality of the 19 works collected here are on poetics. Essays of wider concern address our ongoing crises of public discourse and provide postmodern perspectives on the human condition.

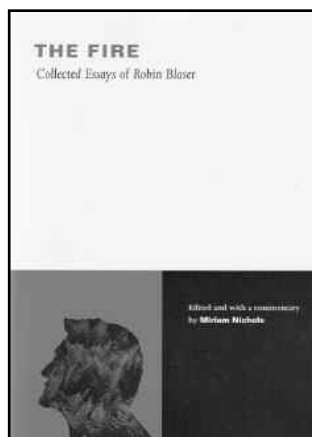
Born in Denver in 1925, Robin Blaser had a singular childhood in Idaho: living in “houses that were always by the railroad tracks, sometimes between two railbeds—the houses were remodeled railway cars, sometimes dining cars—with window after window where the tables had been.” His family lived in towns with “populations of 8 persons, 14, seldom 20—Kimima, Wapai, Orchard.” An adoptive Catholic, he learned The Star-Spangled Banner in Latin. As a boy, too, he mused over Doré’s engraved illustrations in a gigantic volume of *The Divine Comedy*. At the University of California in Berkeley, Blaser associated with a circle of brilliant activist students, the poets Robert Duncan and Jack Spicer and many others in formative alignments post-World War II. After a stint as librarian at Harvard University, Blaser settled in San Francisco and was active in the cultural “renaissance” that included West Coast Beats. Duncan, Spicer and Blaser were scholarly, gay, pacifist and postmodern in stance. (Blaser, it should be noted, does not care for the term “postmodern;” he has referred to it as “post-toasties.”)

Poetry came to Blaser when he was 30. “I have worked since 1955 to find a line which will hold what I see and hear, and which will tie a reader to the poems, not to me.” The poems were taken up in *The Holy Forest*, an open-ended “serial poem” where

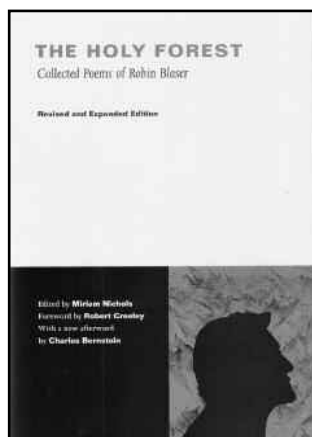
poems tend to act as a sequence of energies which run out when so much of a tale is told. I like to describe this in Ovidian terms, as a *carmen perpetuum*, a continuous song in which the fragmented subject matter is only apparently disconnected.

Collected and published by Talonbooks in 1993, *The Holy Forest* was recently reissued by the University of California Press (with *Collected Poems* added to the title). Where the earlier edition began with Cups, a sequence written in 1959, this edition begins the anterior Boston Poems, 1956-1959. Blaser’s anti-lyric voice was already well-developed.

He wrote “The Fire,” the title essay in this companion volume, in 1967. By that time he had moved to Vancouver, started teaching at Simon Fraser University and begun publishing a literary journal, *Pacific Nation*. “The Fire” appeared in the first issue. It was a poetic manifesto — his spirited response to criticism published by his ex-friend Robert Duncan panning his loose translations of Gérard de Nerval. Blaser soon jettisoned the journal to devote his energies to teaching. He taught literature for 20 years (is Professor Emeritus) and took Canadian citizenship in 1974. Over the 36 years these essays span, poems and prose inter-



The Fire: Collected Essays of Robin Blaser (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006)



Robin Blaser's The Holy Forest, originally published by Talonbooks, republished in an expanded edition by the University of California Press

twined with teaching and public speaking. The origins of several of these essays were in talks about poetics or politics; one is a transcription.

Blaser outlined the basis of his poetic in “The Fire” and “The Stadium of the Mirror” (1973). “The real business of poetry is cosmology.” He argues for openness of word and mind within the enterprise of “making a world.” This interesting idea came, he relates, from “The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood” by Edith Cobb (1959): “What a child wanted to do most of all was to make a world in which to find a place to discover a self.” Making “a world” is a recurrent motive in Blaser’s sensibility.

Three large essays reveal the writer’s poetic milieu: studies of Jack Spicer (1975), George Bowering (1980) and Louis Dudek (1988). “The Practice of Outside” was published with *The Collected Works of Jack Spicer*. The exposition of Spicer’s poetic tips the scales at 51 pages. What is Outside? How does one practice it? Blaser began practicing Outside two years before meeting Charles Olson, whose “composition by field” followed similar principles. This is about as close as we get to definitions:

In an extreme move to gain what he variously called a dictation, the unknown, an outside, Jack’s work contradicts them as resolutions or explanations of anything. . .

...the poems carry “messages” and the poet tends to disappear from his work.

Elsewhere Blaser derides “the naïveté of trying to gain outwardness, or rather its semblance, by erasing all the I’s of a poem and substituting other pronouns... the Other is not an object, but acts chiasmatically”—that is, by “intertwining,” he elsewhere glosses (from *chiasma*, “crossings” in anatomy and genetics; Blaser borrowed the concept from the phenomenologist M. Merleau-Ponty). Nor is Spicer’s “dictation” just inspired journalising. In a transcribed talk in Vancouver in 1965 he said, “Sometimes it’s a twelve-hour struggle to get a ten-line poem, not changing a single word as you’re writing, but just as it goes along—trying to distinguish between the outside and the inside.”

Essays on Bowering and Dudek capture the state of poetry in Canada. “George Bowering’s Plain Song” anatomises the “deep division in Canadian poetic concern.” Blaser is hugely affirmative about the integrity of Canadian poetry, but his enthusiasm is clearly on the side of the adventurous:

The term, ‘post-modern,’ so conscientiously inserted into Canadian criticism by Frank Davey—and supported by Bowering’s own literary essays—signals a strong movement among important Canadian writers to separate themselves from certain characteristics of modernism. Their emphasis is upon the democratic and against the authoritarian, upon naturalness of language, and upon fragment-structures of thought and feeling without undue anxiety about the absence of reconciliatory and conservative structures of meaning.

The “post-modern” or “universist” camp (Davey’s term) opposes (or ignores) the conservative tendencies of the “humanists.” The distinctions can be stated in different ways. In the following, the quoted extract is from *Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance: Literary Portraits of Gertrude Stein* by Wendy Steiner (1978):

Nowadays, the condition of the artist and the identity of the artist, his portrait, fall “. . . within the twentieth century conflict by realism and naturalism on the one hand, and stream of consciousness, surrealism, and archetypal literature on the other—a minute faithfulness to accepted categories of mean-

(continued on page 16)

BLASER (continued from page 15)

ing versus a direct chronicling of mental process, in whatever guise that process is understood to exist.”

“Direct chronicling of mental process” reduces the postmodern stance to misleading simplicity. But read George Bowering’s *Particular Accidents: Selected Poems*, where Blaser’s essay was first published (he was editor, Bowering his academic colleague). This reader did indeed begin by suffering “undue anxiety about the absence . . . of meaning.” It soon gave way to delight at the energy of play and self-discovery in Bowering’s language.

Why did George Bowering’s excellence escape me for so long? For the same reason I dismissed Canadian poetry as inconsequential. In my education, T.S. Eliot was the very model of a modern Major Poet. Blaser puts his finger on one problem: “the deracinated curriculum of culture in which every romantic author is misread and sentimentalized.” Deracinated means “displaced from one’s native or accustomed environment.” A “deracinated curriculum of culture” skewed my thinking about literature and art. My “culture” was a museum where all eras are somehow simultaneously present — as if there is no evolution, no lived Present, no theatre of possibility. That perspective is imposed; it is part of “cultural condition.” One can abandon it and start over. Blaser writes about being “dragged,” when a student, by Robert Duncan “into the twentieth century, where we have to work.” In a talk on Spicer, he took the tongue out of the cheek: “It seems to be one of the great crimes of the century that so few come into the twentieth century at all.”

The centrepiece of this collection is “The Violets” (1983), a careful tracing of Charles Olson “translating” Alfred North Whitehead’s “philosophy of organism” into a poetic that fully accounts for the flux of the world. I note with interest that “The Violets” was first published in *Process Studies*, the organ of a fellowship that holds Whitehead in high esteem for his contribution to a theology for the postmodern world. Olson explained his use of Whitehead in two little books edited by Ann Charters, notably *The Special View of History* (written 1956, published 1970). “The Violets” elucidates both Whitehead and Olson in a way that, as Blaser hoped, does not abridge the meaning of either.



Left to right: Robert Duncan, Charles Olson, Ruth Witt Diamant, San Francisco State University 1958

Whitehead was the guiding spirit of Olson’s *Maximus Poems IV, V, VI* — “my great master and the companion of my poems.” To Blaser, Olson’s work in *The Maximus*, set among the “disturbed meanings of our time,” was part of “a fundamental struggle for the nature of the real.” As Whitehead was one of Olson’s mentors, so Olson was one of Blaser’s. Blaser triangulates them in order to get at an obscure matter. Whitehead’s philosophy, outlined in *Process and Reality, an Essay in Cosmology* (1929), turned 24 centuries of Aristotelian metaphysics on its head by asserting that the ultimate stuff of reality is not substance but process — not things but the interacting and interrelatings of things. Among the terms Whitehead created to carry his speculative framework are “scalar” and “vector,” borrowed from the physics of force. As Blaser puts it (quoting Olson’s edition of *Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*):

the scalar is “a quantity fully described by a number” and a vector is “a complex entity representative of a directed magnitude, as of a force or a velocity.” Understood as Olson appears to understand them, the one is complete form (say, the subjective poetry of the old humanism) while the other is coming into form by attention.

The splendid phrase “coming into form by attention” is suggestive of Blaser’s own poetic — the practice of Outside.

A parallel stream in Blaser’s writing, engagement with the political, is introduced in “Particles.” Written the same year as “The Fire” and published in *Pacific Nation* #2, “Particles” points to language as a common element of politics and poetry and ponders the challenge posed by the misuse of the language of public discourse. Another,

less obvious, linkage of poetry and politics is in the “particularities” the title points to. Particularity is the ground of action in both politics and poetics. Occasionally politics and poetics actually share a pew. “Particles” recounts the stirring story of the poet Miguel de Unamuno telling truth to power in a grand hall in Salamanca in the early days of the Spanish Civil War. The image of Unamuno’s courage bolsters Blaser’s plea for “the serious ground of poetry.”

The place of the poet in the realm of public discourse is one of several themes of “The Recovery of the Public World” (1993). Blaser surveys the “entanglements of discourses” in the social, political, artistic and spiritual spheres. Dark forces have flooded the public domain with bogus “humanisms.” In the history of the idea of *humanitas* and its falling out, Dante is a beacon of reference for Blaser — “a toiler in discourses in the full range of thought, not in what the modern mind takes to be the merely personal voice of poetry.”

(The new *Holy Forest* is substantially enlarged by Blaser’s 1997 poem “Dante Alighieri,” one of several about his Great Companions.) The phrase “recovery of the public world” is the coinage of another of Blaser’s “companions,” Hannah Arendt, the political theorist who fearlessly took up issues of the Nuclear age that few wanted to look at, beginning with the monumental *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). Blaser’s account of the dumbing of the humanist tradition builds on Arendt’s history of a hopeful idea in *Between Past and Future* (1963): “‘The discovery of antiquity in the Renaissance,’ she notes, ‘was a first attempt to break the fetters of tradition, and by going to the sources themselves to establish a past over which tradition would have no hold.’” The Renaissance also revived, Blaser adds, arch-traditional Roman church values, which have “defined, codified, and displaced many of the interesting questions surrounding the qualities of being human.”

“The Irreparable,” the latest work in the collection, is a reflection on human possibilities “in the midst of delirium, dishonesty and the theft of meaning” after September 11. The title is from the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, yet another mind to which Blaser’s writing introduced me, in *The Coming Community* (1993):

“The Irreparable is that things are just as they are, in this or that mode, consigned without remedy to their way of being. States of things are irreparable, whatever they may be: sad or happy, or atrocious or blessed. How you are, how the world is — this is the Irreparable.”

Blaser riffed on Agamben’s concept in a 1994 talk and delivered “The Irreparable” in other forms before publishing this version as a chapbook in 2003. It’s the loosest essay, verging on collage. Parts read like a commonplace. He employs parataxis — a “democratic” arrangement of words, “one thing beside another without ‘expression of their syntactic relation,’” he writes (without sourcing his quote, a rarity).

The tone is inclusive and prescriptive. One prescription is *to refuse*: to walk *aporia*, no-road, quoting Agamben’s *Infancy and History: the Destruction of Experience* (1993): “‘The absence of a road (the *aporia*) is the only possible experience for man.’” Another is to abandon “‘the empty, continuous, quantified, infinite time of vulgar historicism’” and follow “‘the full, broken, indivisible and perfect time of concrete human experience.’” Another, “‘to redefine the concept of the transcendental in terms of its relation with language.’” The reader will search the text in vain for more about “the transcendental” in its “relation with language,” as if to suggest the reader should look elsewhere — within? — for the linkage.

There’s much more in *The Fire* — essays on art, on the music of Bach, on the gay English novelist Mary Butts. A refined sensibility is evident on every page. A self-described voracious reader, Blaser lards his prose generously with quotations from fresh and unusual sources in literature, philosophy and letters — but not the social sciences; he abhors “anthropologism,” etc. Through it all runs that thread of metaphysical interrogation and the theme of intellectual combat. Challenging our assumptions cosmologic (what are we? where do we come from?) and ontologic (what is reality? what is real?). Through it all, too, is that language of “relaxed” meanings. It makes for challenging reading and, for anyone seeking their literary bearings, essential reading.

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

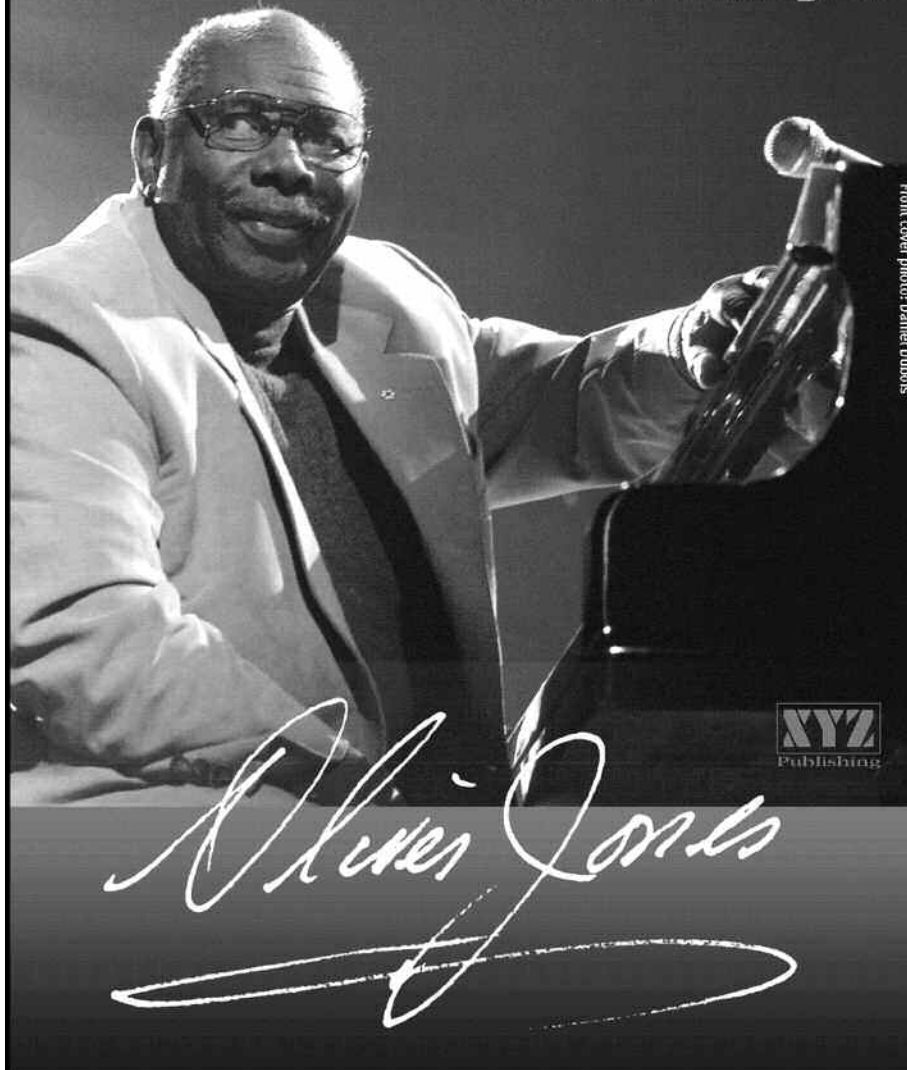


Giorgio Agamben

OLIVER JONES

THE MUSICIAN,
THE MAN

a biography by
Marthe Sansregret



Front cover photo: Daniel Dubois

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Oliver Jones

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

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MY MOTHER IS AN ALIEN: TEN TAKES ON LIFE AND FILM

Martin Van Woudenberg

If George Melnyk is not a nationally well known Canadian writer, it is not due to lack of effort or output. At various points in his life, he has been passionately thinking and writing about religion, politics and activism, regional history, and more recently about film. He has completed a two-volume *Literary History of Alberta*, and the ambitious *One Hundred Years of Canadian Cinema*. It was through this latter project that he came to write *My Mother is an Alien: Ten Takes on Life and Film*, a book about approaches to film, criticism, and philosophy.

Unlike a project on the history of a subject both concrete and connected, this 144 page paperback initially proves difficult to come to terms with. Melnyk opens discussions on ten films seemingly chosen at random. They range from commercial blockbusters like *Gandhi*, *Das Boot*, and the *Aliens* series, to virtual unknowns (within mainstream circles) such as Denys Arcand's *Invasions*, Richard Bugajski's *Clearcut*, and Jean-Claude Lauzon's *Léolo*. As an avid watcher of cinema, I still have to confess that none of these final three films are familiar to me. Why then read a book on film criticism that talks very specifically about ones many readers have never seen? There are several possible answers to this question. Melnyk could be trying to convince his readers about the value in these lesser-known works, and by revealing their depth is hoping that new viewers will experience them. This seems a rather banal purpose for writing a book however. Another explanation could be that Melnyk has found a central theme throughout these works, and is unfolding their connections and common threads of thought or purpose. However, when I finished reading through his often-sidetracked streams of narrative, this option also became implausible.

Thankfully, Melnyk himself provides some direction for his readers in and through his narrative. The common thread that connects the ten films under discussion is simply the author, his history, his experiences, and his personal connection to various forms of art – one of which happens to be film. Interestingly, for a book about specific films, the text spends very little time actually talking about them. Instead, readers discover almost a personal diary, filled with reflections, musings, joys and regrets. Through his birth in Germany and his parent's stories of Nazi oppression, Melnyk finds meaning in Lothar-Gunther Buchheim's *U-Boat War* non-fiction picture book, its fictional brother *The Boat*, and the Wolfgang Peterson film. Through his mother's strength and his father's seemingly comparative weakness, the author connects to the warrior-protector idealized in Sigourney Weaver's character of Ripley in all four *Aliens* films. Each of the other works mentioned in his book bear similar relevance to the writer, often far secondary to the purpose of the film or a mainstream audience's likely interpretations of them.

These discussions are not high-brow intellectual discourse; their purpose is different. As Melnyk states, "Few of us spend much time in the garden of self-consciousness, preferring instead to wander through the world of sensory experience. But sometimes we do seek to understand ourselves." The author's intent is to provide a guide for just such an exercise – be it self-revelation or the understanding of another. For example, in *Clearcut*, Melnyk comes to a realization of his father's difficulty in adjusting as an immigrant in a strange country and culture. Referencing Carl Jung's theories and the sadistic character Arthur in the film, connections are made to the concept of the wilderness, the hidden terror of the unknown, and the refusal to admit it in the life of his father. The film is merely a reference point in this discovery, and through the tone and structure of his prose, the reader can almost see the pieces falling into place and working themselves into the platform of a new and deeper understanding.

At times, these revelations are life-altering. Melnyk purposefully uses *Gandhi*,
(continued on page 31)



**My Mother is an Alien:
Ten Takes on Life and Film**
George Melnyk.
Banff Centre Press
150 pages, \$18.95

LOUISIANA IN WORDS

Len Gasparini

Pronounce the name Louisiana slowly: *Lou-i-si-an-a*. The first syllable is the shape of a kiss, followed by vowel sounds that slide off the tongue and exude the easy repose of a bayou blooming with waterlilies on a summer afternoon.

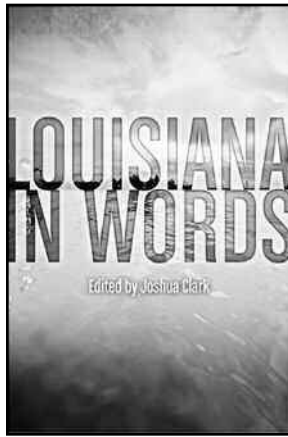
Having once lived in the Pelican State, I opened Editor Joshua Clark's anthology, *Louisiana in Words*, as though it were a gift. I was not disappointed.

The 100-odd prose vignettes in this book comprise a day in the life of Louisiana, and "run chronologically from dawn to dawn, merging past and present," says Clark in his predawn Introduction. "They reveal our state in all its simplicity and complexity, and provide a mosaic that conveys a whole Louisiana to the disparate regions within our state, to the outside world, and to the future."

An outline map of the L-shaped state, dotted with towns and cities, precedes the text.

Louisiana in Words begins appropriately enough with short, descriptive anecdotes of hunting and fishing. After all, this is "Sportsman's Paradise," and the outdoor settings—the sights, the sounds, the smells—are evoked with a vividness that has a physical impact. "The light fog shifts around him in rhythm with the air," writes Edward Gauthier. "The sharp blast of a 20-gauge shotgun echoes through the fog, shocking the morning awake, followed immediately by an ocean-wave rush of thousands of Canada geese thrashing the air."

Two hours later, we're on Highway 23 with Louise McKinney, formerly of Toronto, and author of *New Orleans: a Cultural History*. She and her two hung over



Louisiana in Words
edited by Joshua Clark.
Pelican Publishing,
2007. 205 pp. \$19.95

companions are driving south in a rental car. "Beer cans that chased last night's Jim Beam are now making tinny floor chimes," she writes. "In Venice, Louisiana, there's only the cathedral of the wide morning sky stretching over the Gulf of Mexico...and a Baptist church sign that warns: 'It sure is hot, but hell's hotter.'"

Although there are several established writers in this anthology, such as Barry Gifford and Andrei Codrescu, what really stands out is the collective effort to create beauty out of Louisiana life with a zesty garnish of colloquialisms that are as country as a plate of butterbeans.

In Bev Marshall's diurnal sketch, a Ponchatoula strawberry farmer tells his son: "You can't learn to appreciate life watching television and playing video games. You've got to get out in the fields where Mother Nature will cure your blues."

In certain of these pieces, Cajun and Negro dialects animate the dialogue, imbuing the subject matter with down-home realism. A humorous example of the latter is Marianne Mansfield's scene of a midmorning social exchange between a man, his auntie, and his "old mahogany mistress."

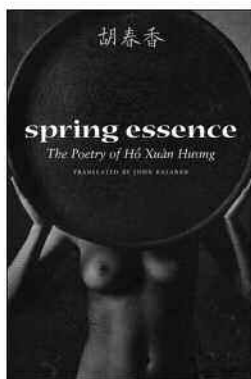
I read Barry Gifford's "8:00 p.m." some years ago in a special issue of the journal *Negative Capability*, in which I had a poem. Gifford's recollection of a long-ago trip to New Orleans in a "powder-blue Cadillac" with his Mafioso father retains the freshness of innocent wonder he felt as a young boy.

Lee Meitzen Grue's lyrical run-on prose parallels the kaleidoscopic street life of the French Quarter. And Graham Clarke, with keen eye and ear, gives the reader a running commentary on rollicking zydeco music and drunken revelry inside a Cajun restaurant in Breaux Bridge after midnight.

There are bleak moments too, like Burk Foster's unflinching look at life in Angola Prison. "When Les asks the guard why Death Row is not air-conditioned, the guard says: 'Neither is hell. This is practice.' Les is joking; he is pretty sure the guard is

(continued on page 28)

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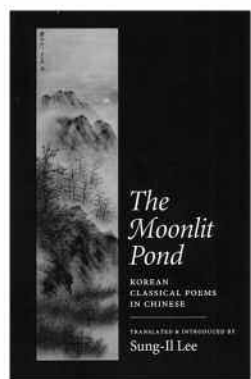


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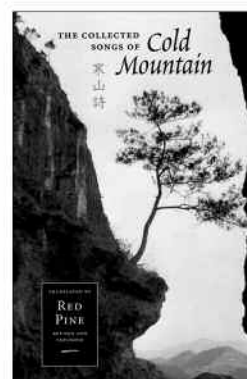
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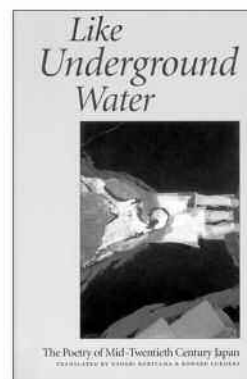
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MY MOTHER AGREES WITH THE DEAD

Yvonne Blomer

Between birth and death there are innumerable objects that gather around us like links on a fence tying one moment to the next until a loved one dies and all goes curbside leaving a perplexed sense of longing. Those objects resonate as the body of the person they are linked to no longer can; to ice the cake, all that was comes back of an evening, for dinner, to revisit and haunt.

This is life as explored in *My mother agrees with the dead* a marvelous collection of poems by Susan Stenson, an easily recognized and much celebrated Victoria poet. These poems resonate in the house, our heart, and allow grief to spark the fire and open the body to joy and sorrow.

The collection is divided into four parts, each one resting from time to time on the death of the poet's mother. At least Stenson explores the death of a mother and the experiences and grief of that. It is never safe to make an assumption, poetry being neither fiction nor fact but something less stable and more knowing; volatile yet earthy. However, the collection starts with a eulogy to a mother's life and ends with an October death, her husband lost and "Cigarette after cigarette/ dropped in the suburbs on the crazy map of grief."

Between poems on death there is a chorus of characters inhabiting these poems that are living – perhaps exactly as Thoreau meant when he wrote "I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life" – self-sufficiently and simply.

In the poem "Make Believe" for example, the narrative takes leaps in a similar way that the old Persian ghazal does. It feels as if as the reader we are invited into this family, we know "I" and we know "Mother" and when in the last line we get "Visit Edna" we pause for a moment wondering who she is and what relationship and then, somehow it doesn't seem to matter; an assumption is confidently made that we'll figure out the rest of the characters, or hasn't everyone been through something similar and don't we all just know. In that assumption there is a kind of celebration of the human experience: the small, quiet grief of living that settles and unsettles the heart.



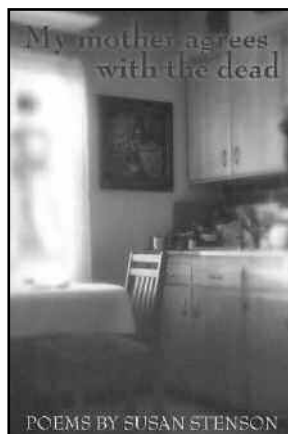
Susan Stenson

Poems that seem to effortlessly hum show a strength, not of rhyme or meter, but of a certain kind of cadence that comes with artful line-breaks and stunning leaps. In the poem "Wake" for example, "Robins bring me to the porch,/ to a clothesline pinned to the wall/ where I see my mother's hands,/ that same memory returning." In these first four lines we start with robins and end with the memory of the mother's hands returning in the same way the Robin returns.

This is metaphor in the way two objects become one; one stands in for the other and both do the same thing. There is stillness and beauty and grief in the lines, but also an edge of violence or perhaps anger at the returning image and emotion of the memory in the lines "a clothesline pinned to the wall". Pinned having the sense of being stuck, pegged, crucified even. And who is pinned – the clothesline, yes, but also the grief and the woman stuck with this image and these memories' constant return.

There are a few striking influences in this collection from a touch of Mary Oliver in poems where human experience is hooked in narrative to animal and of Patrick Lane in the long-limbed breathless poem "Her breathing, for example". I mentioned Thoreau earlier and stick with that notion of everyday people sucking that marrow and the strength of naming her characters without any explanation of who they are.

(continued on page 28)



My mother agrees with the dead
Susan Stenson.
Wolsak and Wynn, 2007

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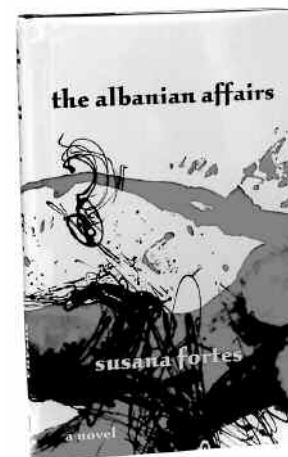
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THE ASTRO BOY ESSAYS

Hillel Wright

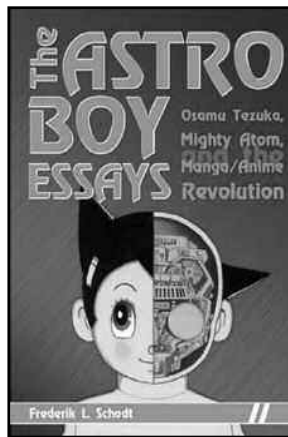
Frederik L. Schodt is without doubt the Western world's leading authority on Japanese *manga*. His 1983 *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics* remains the classic in its field. Schodt is also the translator of many of Japan's most famous manga, including *Barefoot Gen*; *a Cartoon History of Hiroshima*, *The Rose of Versailles*, and *Ghost in the Shell*, now morphed into a popular computer game.

Schodt was also a close personal friend of Astro Boy's creator Osamu Tezuka ("The God of Manga"), translated 23 volumes of *Astro Boy* manga, and served as Tezuka's interpreter when the cartoonist visited America. So it comes as no surprise that Schodt would be the author to write Astro Boy's "biography".

One problem that Schodt had to tackle in writing *The Astro Boy Essays* was to decide whether this biographical work was mainly about the fictional robot boy comics and animation hero, or the artist who gave him "life". The problem is compounded by the fact that for the early part of his career, the artist and his creation were nearly inseparable, like Walt Disney and Mickey Mouse.

Although Schodt decides to resolve the problem by concentrating on the history of Astro Boy, or more properly *Tetsuan Atomu* (Mighty Atom) as he's known in Japanese, Osamu Tezuka appears in virtually every scene, like a shadow. Part of the reason for this is the fact that Tezuka, unlike Disney and the later Marvel Comics cartoonists, insisted on drawing the manga himself, rather than relying on teams of artists, colorists and letterers to facilitate production.

Another problem Schodt encountered was the dichotomy of Astro Boy the



The Astro Boy Essays: Osamu Tezuka, Mighty Atom, and the manga-anime revolution.
Frederik L. Schodt,
Stone Bridge Press,
2007. 216 p. \$16.95

manga character and Astro Boy the *anime*, or TV animation character. Obviously, given the more restrictive environment of children's programming on television, many of the more mature thematic aspects present in the manga, which were read on several levels by a rather wide demographic, were excised.

The introduction of the *Astro Boy* anime on American TV created a further personality split for the boy robot hero — the American Astro Boy vs. the Japanese



Osamu Tezuka in his studio

Tetsuan Atomu. As Schodt explains, the translated versions which appeared in America were less than faithful to the original stories and indeed, few Western viewers ever realized that, unlike the similar character Mighty Mouse, Astro Boy was Japanese.

The life of Osamu Tezuka also became increasingly schizophrenic. While his boyhood hero Walt Disney was a consummate businessman as well as a talented artist, Tezuka was not, and eventually saw his original company, Mushi Productions, go bankrupt. In fact, Tezuka described manga as his "wife", while anime was his "mistress" and burned up a disproportionate amount of the "husband's" money. Subsequently, with Schodt focusing on the career of Astro Boy, the career of Osamu Tezuka, whose later creations *Buddha*, *The Phoenix* and *Black Jack* were actually closer to his heart and soul, becomes somewhat distorted. Perhaps a full-length biography of Tezuka would have made a more satisfying read.

Finally, in the opinion of this reviewer, the book suffers from a serious organizational error. By proceeding in chronological order, the story climaxes too early, with the sensational success generated by *Tetsuan Atomu* for Tezuka, animation and Japanese culture in the 1950s.

As Tezuka fails in business, *Astro Boy* is eclipsed by other manga and anime heroes, and his creator falls into ill health and an early death, the book steadily becomes more difficult and less interesting to read. Perhaps beginning at the end and working back to Astro Boy's glory days would have been a more successful narrative strategy.

Hillel Wright is author of the novel *Border Town*, the story of a fictional manga artist and her works.

SIT DOWN AND SHUT UP

James Eke

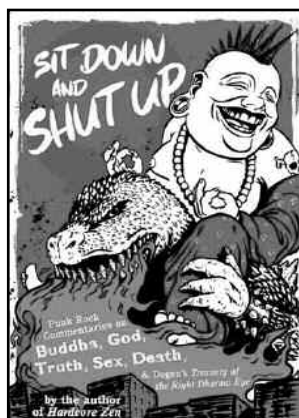
Sit Down and Shut Up.

Short. Sweet. And pretty good instructions for anyone wanting to take a good look at themselves and the universe around them and as it happens, also the name of the latest offering from punk, Zen priest and monster-movie marketer, Brad Warner.

Where *Hardcore Zen: Punk Rock, Monster Movies, and the Truth About Reality*, Warner's first, 2003 tome left off, *Sit Down and Shut Up: Punk Rock Commentaries on Buddha, God, Truth, Sex, Death & Dogen's Treasury of the Right Dharma Eye* picks up and ends with a book that not only is hard to put down but makes most mainstream Buddhist books seem academic and, well, boring.

There are a number of things Warner does right in his blend of autobiographic way of explaining what Zen and Buddhism means to him — but the most important is that he makes it all make sense in a way that any number of books on Zen or Buddhism haven't.

Warner covers all the usual topics of Buddhist books — sex, death, God, anger, meditation — but intermingles it with his personal life, shakes it all together and pours out a mixture that leaves you wanting more and wondering where this modern day Zen priest and monster-movie fanatic has been all your life.



Sit Down and Shut Up: Punk Rock Commentaries on Buddha, God, Truth, Sex, Death, and Dogen's Treasury of the Right Dharma Eye
Brad Warner
New World Library
2007, 256 pages

The core of *Sit Down and Shut Up* is one of the big, heavy and sometimes hard-to-swallow-in-one-gulp 13th century greats of Zen literature, Dogen Zenji's *Shobogenzo* (*Treasury of the Right Dharma Eye*) — a book that for any that have tried to unravel its intricacies know that it is best taken in small slivers and then likely more than once. Warner takes this book and breathes fresh breath into it making not only *Sit Down and Shut Up*, but the *Shobogenzo* something fresh, new and full of life that can't help but make a personal difference to everyone who reads it.



Brad Warner with Godzilla

The thing that makes *Sit Down and Shut Up*

so great of a book is not just the ease at which Warner explains sometimes deep topics of life and Zen, but his no punches pulled way of telling the readers as it is — if Warner doesn't really believe in a pie-in-the-sky thing like enlightenment, he's going to tell you and make sure you understand exactly what he means and why.

Take punk, monster movies and Zen or leave it but *Sit Down and Shut Up* can't be dismissed as a dry book about a confusing philosophy and an esoteric Eastern religion. Warner's book makes the reader want to know more — and at times wish they knew less — so that they could break down the doors of reality and see life as it really is.

And in the end, as Warner admonishes us to do, and the title suggests, to find the truth, to get to what this book is hinting at all of us need to do one simple and yet profoundly difficult thing — *Sit Down and Shut Up*.

James Eke, the author of *Falling Backwards*, is currently working on two new novels (*Roadside Saints and Trailer Trash*) and a book of poetry (*Bodhisattva Poem*).

A MEMOIR OF FRIENDSHIP

Linda Rogers

Letters between writers, have traditionally provided insight into the life and times of authors who prefer to distance themselves from their articulate thoughts. Their private letters, notwithstanding the guile that shapes any form of utterance, come closer to the bone than even, say, poetry, presumably the most intimate of literary genres.

Now we have email, which has all but destroyed the beautiful conventions of letter writing: the choice of paper and ink, the handwriting which reveal so much about the sender. Ladies of our mother's generations paid a great deal attention to the quality of paper and the calligraphy. Now we whip off cyber notes that leave a while lot to the imagination. Humour gets mis-read. Rage escalates. E mail is cryptic and unreliable.

By the end of Carol Shield's life, she and her friend Blanche Howard had more or less abandoned handwritten letters. Carol, suffering the ravages of chemotherapy, had limited strength; and Blanche had a very ill husband to care for. Still the correspondence of decades continued as the two women shared their private and public lives.

Occasionally I clear out my email, but, just as Buddhism teaches its followers not to speak ill of the dead, I am loathe to discard their electronic greetings. My collection is getting larger. David Grierson, Carol Shields, Anne Szumigalski and other familiar voices remain in the freshness of immediacy, which is the advantage of this kind of communication.

Carol was a friend and, through her, I met Blanche Howard several times. Blanche was one of the devoted posse that Carol could count on when her life took a sad turn. This exchange of letters between old friends illustrate the way in which every person who knew Carol was joyfully privileged because of her unique gift for friendship.

Every letter in this collection, no matter how besieged the writer was feeling, contains a blessing. Carol and Blanche gave one another permission to take on a world that was not yet accustomed to accommodating women writers. Their feminism was deep, much deeper than their conventional appearance.

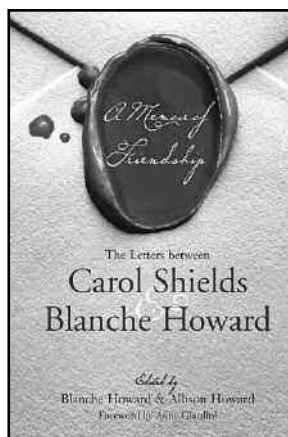
I don't believe I ever left Carol's house without her saying, "You are a good person." That was her gift to me. She had gifts for all of us and her letters to Blanche are full of them: concern for Balnche's health and that of her husband, concern for her writing, caring thoughts about children, and lots of good humour.

Blanche and Carol lived in that oxymoron, the literary community, where friendship is often conditional and competition is rife. In her letters, Carol makes it clear that she is aware of ways in which her new celebrity might impact on a friend and makes every effort to be inclusive. She remembered her own knocks and Blanche's generosity to her when she was more experienced at "the game."

I don't know Blanche's private voice, but Carol's is very present in these letters. She admits her occasional exasperations, the disappointments as well as the celebratory moments, which unfortunately came one after another when she had less and less time to enjoy them fully. Still, despite adversity, both women maintained the delightful sense of irony that furnished their friendship, their writing and their astute assessment of other writers.

No one speaks from inside middle class academia, with its ambitions and snobberies, with more gentle acuity than the writer who was eventually lauded as one of their own, but had sometimes been left out in the cold without a coat on. She never forgot that and, indeed, readers of *The Stone Diary* will remember Daisy's betrayal in the workplace that echoes one of her own.

What comes clear in this correspondence is the possibility of friendship, how two women can help one another through the best and worst of times. Little aggravations were released in humorous asides, everything as neat and tidy as the houses they ran while writing their books and collaborating on a play that was an extension of their thirty year conversation. Look between the lines and the passion is there – the thrill of acceptance, and the pain of disappointment, the largest of which was a life curtailed by a larger lottery than the one that allowed Carol to win at the game of fame.



A Memoir of Friendship, the Letters Between Carol Shields and Blanche Howard, Edited by Blanche Howard and Allison Howard, with a forward by Anne Giardini, Viking Canada, 2007, hardcover, 552 pages.

This is not the story of a bride and a bridesmaid, but of two intellectual equals for whom the chips fell in different configurations. Although Blanche wrote more letters, Carol matched her commitment to the dialogue. She had less energy at the end of her life, but what she had, she shared with others. Two months before she died, she put aside her own writing to edit my novel *Friday Water*, the story of a woman living with breast cancer, and to co-write the stage play *Unless* (not listed with her plays in this book) with her daughter Sara, generous acts from a generous woman.

Blanche Howard and her daughter Allison have made of these letters a great read and a great tribute to friendship. Love underscores every line.



Carol Shields

Linda Rogers is completing her Victoria trilogy that begins with *The Empress Letters* and writing a novel set in Turkey, which she toured last summer with her husband's band, *Sweet Papa Lowdown*.



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Geraldine

a novel by David Watmough

Geraldine celebrates the pioneering and often turbulent years of a twentieth century woman scientist from Victoria, B.C. through her life as a bio-chemist in Europe and North America. In that sense it is a tribute to feminists of an era when they had to struggle unceasingly to make their way in what was implacably a man's world. Such a journey both strengthened an innate feistiness and left inevitable scars. It was a price that Geraldine and her generation of women warriors were prepared to pay. But *Geraldine* is more than a case of history, more than one man's tribute to what he has witnessed in his own lifetime, it is a novelist's portrait of a remarkable and singular woman, her anguish at senescence dimming recognition of her achievements and the humiliation of being regarded as just a snobbish and crazy old woman.

Naturalized Canadian, David Watmough, 81, has been shaped and nourished by a Cornish background, several years in London, Paris, New York, and San Francisco. All his novels, short stories, plays and poems, however, have been written on Canada's west coast during the past 45 years. *Geraldine* is his eighteenth book and thirteenth of fiction.

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I'M A LIBERAL, YOU'RE AN IDEOLOGUE, HE'S A FALSE POPULIST

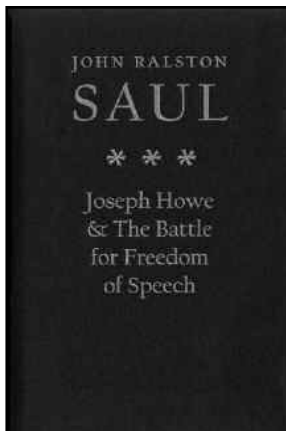
Hilary Turner

On 20 March 2004, the bicentenary of the birth of Joseph Howe, John Ralston Saul delivered this, the inaugural lecture in a series that will commemorate the achievements of the Nova Scotia journalist, reformer, public servant, and crafter of Canadian liberalism. The lecture was delivered at King's College, Halifax to an audience consisting largely of students in the school's esteemed journalism program, then celebrating its twenty-fifth birthday. The oldest chartered university in Canada, founded by United Empire Loyalists who had turned their backs on American-style democracy, is as fitting a venue as one can imagine for discussion of the peculiarly Canadian version of democratic liberalism. The three interlocking components of this innovation are responsible government, state-sponsored education, and the freedom of the press, all three of which found a strong advocate in Howe. These are also Saul's major themes, and he weaves them together in ways that confirm and illustrate their interdependency. Together, the three produce "useful and intelligent citizens" whose right (but also duty) it is to benefit from the unrestricted exchange of ideas.

Despite its enshrinement in the Charter of Rights, Saul believes that the current of free speech ran a good deal clearer in the days of Joseph Howe than it does today. It was greatly purified, of course, in 1835 by Howe's landmark acquittal against charges of criminal libel—an event that established "fundamental ideas, principles, and shapes of freedom of speech and freedom of the press in Canada." Those freedoms were further assisted by the willingness of the press to report the speeches and public debates of the day in scrupulous detail. But the stream has been contaminated in recent times, and the public's grasp of current events has been weakened, by what Saul refers to as the "pulsations" and "primal shouts" of televised news, by columnists whose limited space reduces complex issues to black and white, by the indolence of reporters who ignore grass-roots democracy in favour of the doings of officialdom and who (even then) report on activity in the House of Commons, for example, by watching the monitors in their offices rather than by venturing out into the hurly-burly where true democracy is to be found. Offenses like these have, in Saul's view, left the larger public starved for the sorts of exchanges that still occasionally take place in old-fashioned town-hall meetings.

Leaving aside the errors and oversights of individuals, the larger forces that work against freedom of speech are many, in Saul's account, but disembodied and strangely unattached to identifiable ideologies. There is the modern tendency toward specialization, and specialized jargons which works against "big picture" thinking. There is the "employment contract" which makes the knowledge of specialists (even if they could communicate it intelligibly) the private property of corporations and institutions. There is the information explosion itself, which provides an abundance of facts, but no means by which they can be classified, subordinated, or understood. There is also "false populism," or lack of moderation in public affairs, in which the very absence of reasoned debate becomes the occasion for wild accusations: "When one of these fits of national hysteria get [*sic*] going, you can immediately sense that by the time it is over a lot of people will be embarrassed by the way in which they have acted; the way in which they have allowed the absence of truth to become a satisfying emotional experience." There is, furthermore, the belief that state secrecy, not transparency, is the norm—a belief ironically galvanized by our Freedom of Information Act, which justifies silence on the part of public bodies, right up until the moment when a question is asked. Finally, there is the insouciance with which Canadians have embraced the concepts of intellectual property and the "knowledge economy"—elements in an economic mindset which attaches ownership to ideas, thus restricting their distribution to those who can afford them.

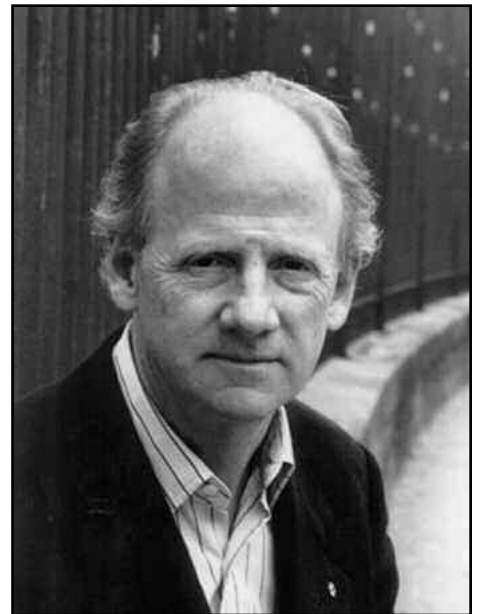
While this seems a straightforward catalogue of culprits (though not exactly of *agents*), it was extracted from the text with difficulty, for the overall organization of



Joseph Howe and the Battle for Freedom of Speech.

John Ralston Saul.
Gaspereau Press
64 pages, \$18.95

this lecture is recklessly associative and circuitous, and the logical or causal relationships among these forces are left to the imagination. It is perhaps unkind to use a man's own well-intentioned laments against him, yet Saul has elsewhere (*Dialogue on Democracy in Canada*, 2002) criticized the tendency of law-makers and bureaucrats to generate textual residues in which "there is never a view of the whole, or even of an entire single logic within the whole." The same complaint must be made of the present work, for Saul permits himself to circle back, to qualify, to digress, to execute unannounced logical leaps, and to free associate with such abandon that his argument is imperiled. To take one small example: in the context of good journalist practice, we are told on page 47 that "in many cases the whole question of



John Ralston Saul

secrecy is not all that relevant," then on page 49 that "the United States creates about six million new secrets a year," and then on page 52 that "it's almost as if information has importance only if it is thought to be secret." Though not quite a self-contradiction, this is confusing, and the discussion badly needs some principle that will help us distinguish the cases where secrecy is not relevant from those where it manifestly is.

Still and all, the values that underlie this lecture are more or less clear. An open society where well-educated citizens have easy access to the ideas that shape their lives is a good thing. At the same time, the characteristic flaw of liberalism is equally clear: nowhere are we told how best to use our freedom, and never are we guided in our evaluation of the plenitude of ideas that are (still) freely available to us. Though Saul has dwelt on a long list of abuses of and impediments to freedom of speech, these are never analysed in political or ideological terms, the lines of "battle" (in his title) are drawn only faintly, and the hypothetical trio (of my title), whose deeds have indeed furnished all the examples and inferences around which the speech is built—the liberal, the ideologue, and the false populist—are impossible to distinguish one from another. In keeping with the general circularity of the discussion, Saul's conclusion is all but identical with his opening: a heart-swelling contemplation of the ninth and tenth lines of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms which identify "freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication" as among the fundamental freedoms to which all are entitled. Freedom is good because it is good. End of discussion.

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

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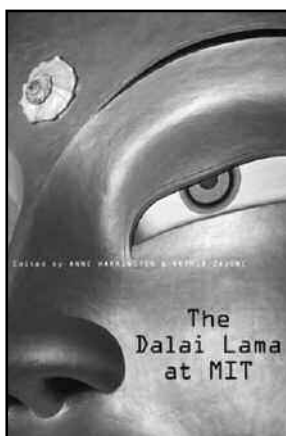
DEPTH PSYCHOLOGY EAST AND WEST: THE DALAI LAMA AT MIT

Patrick Carolan

The *Dalai Lama at MIT*, edited by Anne Harrington and Arthur Zajonc, chronicles the 2007 Investigating the Mind Conference, a historic meeting of minds between a number of leading neuroscientists, psychologists, and prominent Buddhist scholars and monks including His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Taking place over two days during September 2003, the objective of the conference was to engage in dialogue aimed at finding common ground between modern cognitive neuroscience and traditional Buddhism, two perspectives that share a number of surprising similarities. Through the thoughtful, intelligently written papers presented by Buddhist scholars and Western scientists alike, as well as transcripts of the subsequent discussions, this book seeks to recreate the experience of the conference for its readers, and enlighten them to some of the findings that have emerged from this collaboration of the two disciplines.

The premise behind this historic conference was simple. Science is concerned with determining the nature of reality, as is Buddhism, but the latter has largely been ignored by Western scholars because of its focus on discovering truth through the process of introspection, a method often seen as inherently subjective, and thus incompatible with science. Unlike Christianity, with its reliance on dogma and pure faith that has hindered collaboration with science, Buddhism focuses largely on logical discourse, investigation of mental processes, and in many ways is as much a theory of the mind as it is a religion. As such, it seems to provide science with an ideal companion, and leading minds are beginning to conclude that it has been a mistake to ignore it for so long.

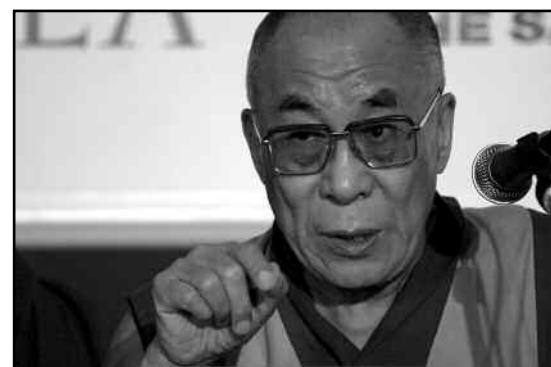
This book examines the three key areas within cognitive science focused upon at the conference: attention, mental imagery and emotion. Leading Buddhists and scientists address each issue, detailing the insights of their respective disciplines, as well as the findings that have already resulted from cooperation, and from new questions now arising from this research. The results are often striking. MRI scans performed on Buddhist monks engaged in meditation showed unique patterns of activation within the brain to emotionally evocative stimuli; monks generating the emotion referred to by Buddhists as "pure compassion" showed spikes of activation in happiness centres of the brain for *both* positive stimuli (a baby laughing) and negative, fear inducing stimuli (a piercing scream). The subsequent questions raised are no less intriguing. Has science been wrong to overlook the importance of compassion in its study of emotions? And if compassion truly is a core human emotion this compels Buddhists to



The Dalai Lama at MIT
Anne Harrington &
Arthur Zajonc, eds.
Harvard UP.
273 pp. \$24.95

address the issue of its evolutionary benefit, as emotions are essentially seen as adaptive traits cultivated within humanity over millions of year in order to help us survive.

The net result of these papers and dialogues is a book that provides readers with a remarkable blend of theology and science, and from such a unique perspective that whether readers approach it as Buddhists seeking knowledge about the empirical workings of the mind, or Westerners seeking enlightenment, there is undoubtedly something for both. Given the scholarly nature of its authors it can be a dense read and the vocabulary is a little heavy. With Buddhist scholars discussing concepts such as the 'imageless mirror of pure awareness', and neuroscientists citing specific brain regions like the left prefrontal cortex and their relations to perception and affect, readers without at least some background in one of the fields may find themselves swamped. However, the effort is greatly rewarded with manifold insights into the respective worlds of Buddhist philosophy and cutting-edge cognitive science that will leave readers with a sense of intellectual fulfillment and a desire to learn more.



The Dalai Lama

Patrick Carolan writes from Vancouver, Canada where he studies cognitive psychology at the University of British Columbia.

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THE SAVAGE DETECTIVES

Al Maclachlan

By *Night in Chile* (*Nocturno de Chile*) is perhaps the finest short novel published anywhere in the last decade. The writing is gorgeous, and its drama slowly evolves like a leisurely river trek in reverse, where entering the last chapters the vaguely anticipated action pounces on the reader like a series of rapids.

Bolaño's last work before he died in Spain at age fifty, entitled *2666*, was not entirely completed and is not as yet available in English. However, it is considered the most important work of his generation by many Spanish speaking critics.

The Savage Detectives (*Los Detectives Salvajes*) too, has been called a masterpiece. Ignacio Echevarria, a Spanish critic, declared it "the novel that Borges would have written." Perhaps in style, but Borges would certainly not be writing about the same generation, their desires, dreams, or the literary scene that the adventurer Bolaño is primarily writing about in this strange novel. Nor would Borges have travelled as an itinerant gypsy.

Bolaño's plot structure in this novel though is maddening. Just when you are totally confused by the number of characters and their intertwining relationships; just as you are about to give up on the work and exchange it for something simpler, like James Joyce's *Ulysses*, the story hits you like a ton of bricks (wherever that expression came from it wasn't the guy that got hit by them).

Nonetheless, it is not an easy novel to follow, and while it is written in beautiful language ("I emerged from the swamp of *mi general* Diego Carvajal's death or the boiling soup of his memory, an inedible, mysterious soup that's poised above our fates, it seems to me, like Damocles' sword or an advertisement for tequila..."), it breaks rules and boundaries of literature that North Americans are not generally used to seeing broken.

For example, the problems with having over 50 different characters is that some of those voices are not distinct enough from others to be memorable. And if 53 characters from many different countries isn't enough to lay down a figurative fog, the main story also bounces around in time and place.

As Graham Greene wrote in his autobiography *Ways of Escape*, "a story hasn't room for more than a limited number of created characters." Of course, Bolaño's characters are not necessarily created, but disguised. The two central characters who everyone talks about are Arturo Belano and Ulises Lima. Arturo being the author and Ulises his half-Indian friend, the poet Mario Santiago. And perhaps the way to look at this work is not so much a novel as a work of Cubist art, with generous portions of Luis Buñuel's surrealist stylistics stirred in. Not that it isn't a great work of literature too, but the influences are from every art form. And throughout one can detect Bolaño's love of slang, of local Spanish, British and American idioms in many of the voices, which may endear him to English speakers.

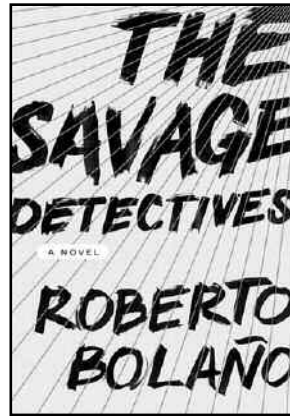
The prelude to *Savage Detectives*, titled *Mexicans Lost in Mexico*, is ostensibly a diary written by 17-year-old García Madero who admires the two 'vagabond poets' much as we all admire those who are older, more experienced than ourselves when they return from their early exploits emitting whiffs of mystery and revolution.

And this is also one allure of this novel. Bolaño was a rebel, wanderer and sometime brigand who was imprisoned in Chile after Allende's assassination; who later used guerrilla tactics to assault staid poetry readings in Mexico city; and then travelled throughout the Mediterranean (Europe, Africa and the Middle East) taking menial jobs of whatever nature he could find.

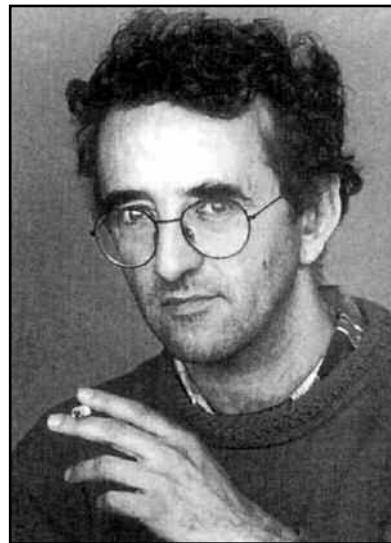
Roberto Bolaño reminds me of the 'archpoet' of the Goliards—poet/ bandits from twelfth century Europe—who as student clerics were protected by the church, and therefore lived outside the kings' law, roaming from public house to tavern creating innovative poetry and song, while wenching, boozing and thieving.

The first section ends with Belano, Lima, García and the young prostitute, Lupe fleeing Quim Font's casa chased by her pimp and a crooked cop. The main story—*Savage Detectives*—is a tangle of journal-style entries or statements from the various characters, most of whom are either talking about Arturo or Ulises or both, from personal experience. Bolaño builds on this, layering it like a Picasso painting until we gradually see the protagonists from multiple angles.

And it is the characters who keep our interest in the straggling plot. Bolaño gets into their heads and their voices as they talk and think about their own lives, but also the lives of the two poets. Ulises (Homer? Joyce?) is a hopeless romantic who can barely survive in Paris or Spain, or even in his own Mexico. His life unravels until he is hanging out in Vienna with a petty gangster named Heimito Künst—the two of them

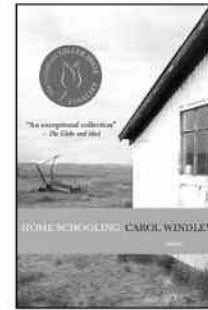


The Savage Detectives
Roberto Bolaño
Vintage
232 pages, \$37.95



Roberto Bolaño

WHAT IS IT ABOUT WEST COAST WOMEN AND FICTION?



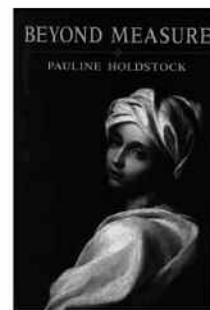
Praise for Giller Prize Finalist Carol Windley

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



Praise for Linda Rogers

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



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



From Cormorant Books. Where Imagination Takes Flight.

(continued on page 28)

VALI MYERS: A MEMOIR

Allan Graubard

Vali Myers first comes to us in *Love on the Left Bank*, a book of photographs by Ed van der Elsken, who graced his cover with her portrait from the early 1950s. There she is at 20 gazing at herself in an old corroded mirror. Audacious, beautiful, with a certain flair for the streets she lived on for eight years and an honesty about herself and her desires that will not desert her, Vali captures, and captivates for us still, that post World War Two bohemia. Lucky for us that Vali was much more than what these photographs frame. And until she passes in 2003 from stomach cancer at the age of 73, she will not let us forget who she is, what she creates, and how she loves. Along the way, constantly perfecting her art, living always as she wishes, she will touch within us a pulse that animates perpetually, and which we leap toward if only to gain its strength as our own.

So it is fortunate now that Gianni Menichetti, her companion of 30 years, has written this memoir. Who, other than Gianni, can tell her story — this man who knew her so well. And who, other than Gianni, can offer it all as a gift to Vali's friends (those with us), the many others who know Vali through her art, and those first meeting her in his words. But be warned: Vali's appeal is infectious.

And thus, her life: She is born in 1930 in Sydney, Australia, of "blue-blood" stock; her father's ancestors, convicts both, being brought to the continent in 1790 and 1792, when danger was a byword and England a memory. At 5 her family moves to the outback, and the wild countryside there begins to shape her. Vali is a precocious and rebellious child, and her love for drawing and dancing distinguish her, even so early on. By 14 she leaves home, working in factories for rent money and to pay for lessons at the Melbourne Modern Ballet Company. She quickly claims eminence as their *premiere danseuse*, and her future seems bright. Adventure though is another lure, and in 1950 she chucks it all and sails for Paris, where she settles finally on the Left Bank. This is not café society for Vali by any means or her version of the young artist on the lam. It's poor, rough and tumble, and Vali ekes out a living dancing in local cabarets while continuing to draw. Her crowd balances on its daily tightrope between stinging hunger and passing starvation, witty pleasure and cruel despair, and the kind of brio that keeps them vivat: artists, hoodlums and roustabouts alike. For her first exhibition there's a police station; a private viewing by cops who had just arrested her on their regular sweep for vagabonds. But Vali puts it best in one of her letters that Gianni excerpts for us: "We lived on the streets and cafes of our Quarter like a pack of 'bastard dogs', and with the strict hierarchy of such a tribe....a world without illusions,



Vali Myers in her studio with her dingo

without dreams... [but with] a dark stark beauty like a short Russian story by Gorky that one doesn't forget." Prison, murder, suicide, and insanity are not unknown here either. Paris is a mecca then, and Vali meets up with a good number of notables. There is the Israeli painter, Mati Klarwein, a real compatriot, and Cocteau and Genet, who she consorts with. Gabriel Pomerand (cofounder of *Lettrism* with Isadore Isou, a leading, if momentary, avant-garde in the city) writes an essay on Vali, now unfortunately lost. It is this essay which George Plimpton uses for his famous *Paris Review*, spring 1958 number, where he publishes Vali's black and white drawings. Django Reinhardt, the great jazz guitarist, embraces Vali completely and considers her one of the family. And, of course, she meets others, the Dutch painter Karel Appel (of COBRA fame, which later inspires the Situationists) and poet Simon Vinkenoog. During the latter part of these years Vali's addiction to opium consumes her, and she retreats for long spells to her cheap hotel



Vali Myers: A Memoir
Gianni Menichetti
The Golda Foundation,
244 pp., illus. Cloth
\$25.00

room, where she dreams and draws, draining herself, as Gianni puts it, "to skin and bones." *Lammas Tide*, a drawing she works on for six years, is the pivot.

By 1958 she's had enough and heads south to Italy and the Amalfi coast, landing in a town that goes by the name of Positano. That she enters the town barefoot, no longer having any shoes to wear, seems perfectly natural, what else was she to do, though it scandalizes the natives who want to throw her out. Of course, they don't. Tennessee Williams and Stella Adler, erstwhile traveling companions, who have come to the town for a spell, take to Vali. Later, in *Orpheus Descending*, as Gianni notes, Williams will base Carol Cutrere, one of his most intriguing minor characters, on Vali; a play that some of us know by its film version, *The Fugitive Kind*. Needless to say, any woman who lies back in a graveyard to rest after a night of juking — and hears the dead whispering "live, live!" — is a woman close to my heart.

Near the town, though, is a steep gorge with tall cliffs that harbors an "ancient abandoned garden," il Porto, that suits Vali perfectly, and which she discovered four years prior. She elects to live there in impoverished splendor, with her husband, Rudi, then Gianni, and her menagerie of animals; a menagerie she cares for with exceptional dedication. Queen here is Foxy, a foundling fox cub, who Vali raises as a mother does her child. For 14 years, Vali and Foxy live side by side, until the fox dies.

If day in il Porto meant work, tending to the animals and other chores, night meant art; her drawings, and the definition of an oeuvre that would soon attract leading curators in Europe and New York, where exhibitions proliferate. Her time in New York, where she roosts at the Chelsea Hotel, brings to her other poets, revolutionaries and performers, from Ira Cohen, to Abbie Hoffman, Debbie Harry (our "Blondie") and more. Bobby Yarra, a friend of Gregory Corso's, also grows close to Vali. It is Bobby, in his role as immigration lawyer, who aids Vali when legal issues erupt about her status in the US. And it is Bobby who arranges, through the auspices of the Golda Foundation, the publication of Gianni's memoirs.

It would be silly of me to record Vali's life further because the book is here for that, with its many insights and funny stories gained from years of intimacy between Gianni and Vali. But I will say this, Vali Myers was an artist who lived her creations and whose art, in response, transfigured her life, and the men and women and animals and places she touched enduringly.

I can only hope that more and more readers pick up this book and take to heart this stunning, fiercely independent woman; and that in her native Australia, which she returned to at the end of her life, her art will reach the people she hailed from; preserving her legacy in a fashion equal, at least in part, to how she created it: from her shoeless feet up, *turning dog shit into stars...*

Allan Graubard is a poet, playwright and critic. His play, *For Alejandra*, premiered in New York, Washington, DC, and Dubrovnik, Croatia, summer 2002.



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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.

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DRABEK (continued from page 3)

hands full with him, trying to explain to the inexperienced employees of the welcoming ministry which protocol should be accorded an official who is neither a king, nor a general or president, yet still warrants the honors due to a head of state. And there are others like "Madlenka", as Drabek calls Madeleine Albright, who was called by that name by Drabek senior, a one-time close friend of her father, Josef Korbel.

The story of *The Doubtful Excellency* ends almost tragically at his second diplomatic post in Tirana, Albania over which the dark clouds of the Bosnian conflict are starting to gather. In this most backward country of Europe which was the home of Enver Hoxa who ruled it by more Stalinist methods than Stalin did Russia, Drabek's wife Joan is suddenly taken ill. The illness is difficult to diagnose but clearly life-threatening and accompanied by terrible pain. The French doctor who runs a small clinic in Tirana advises quick transfer to a hospital.

But there is no reliable hospital in the country and so the ambassador first tries to gain access to a small airplane under control of the American Embassy, which could take Joan to an Italian hospital. Except that the plane is unavailable because on that very day a revolution is starting in Albania. The ambassador calls the Czech Ministry, requesting a special plane which would take the patient to Prague. And here he encounters a bureaucracy which the state had inherited from Communist Czechoslovakia. The strange habits of the totalitarian government are still imbedded there.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs is incapable of solving the problem of payment. When the desperate ambassador offers to pay for it from his own pocket a new problem arises: can their own ambassador can be trusted? Meanwhile the patient is losing consciousness. In the end the second problem is solved too. The plane lands and takes off again from revolutionary Albania, taking the half-dead Joan to Prague's Central Military Hospital, at that time still the best equipped medical institution in the country.

After the operation the surgeon explains to the ambassador that the life of his wife hung by a thread. She suffered from peritonitis, perforated ulcer and an inflamed



Jan Drabek with H.M. the Queen (from *His Doubtful Excellency*)

appendix. The ambassador breathes more easily, telling the doctor that in desperation he tried to get his wife via a commercial airline to Vienna so she could be operated on there.

She wouldn't have been alive by then, the doctor replies matter-of-factly.

Drabek's grippingly told diplomatic, and at the same time human story is a singular work of its kind. It appears to be the first insider's testimony about the background of a somewhat imperfect miracle which took place after the bloodiest power in European history collapsed.

The esteemed author of The Bass Saxophone and other novels, Josef Skvorecky writes from Toronto.

The Malahat Review

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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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WHERE LITERATURE MEETS SPORT

Heather Kerr

A testament to the lack of overlap between the worlds of literature and elite sport can be summed up in one word on the cover notes of *The Bone Cage* – speed. One of the novel’s protagonists, Sadie, is described as “a 26-year-old speed swimmer”, presumably to distinguish her preparation for the Olympics from the leisurely breaststroke in bathtub-temperature community pools by those in floral caps. Anyone serious enough to do a flip turn in a sport that the novel proclaims to be “the only thing more boring than long-distance running” just calls those laps, *swimming*.

This is what makes Angie Abdou’s first novel – a rare literary portrayal of sport – noteworthy. Abdou is a Ph.D candidate in the University of Calgary’s creative writing program, and a former university and current Master’s-level swimmer who teaches English at Cranbrook BC’s College of the Rockies. Her pedigree comprises a previous collection of short stories (*Anything Boys Can Do*, Thistle-down Press, 2006), a father who was recently inducted into Lakehead University’s sports hall of fame, and brother who wrestled for Canada in the 1996 Olympics. She is among those best poised to masterfully write the sensuality and emotion of swimming and wrestling, which readers of all backgrounds can appreciate in *The Bone Cage*’s story. Its window of insight into the long periods of toil and fleeting moments of recognition that are elite sport leaves athlete readers thankful for the realistic representation of their quixotic lifestyle. Non-athletes are afforded an uncensored glance into this bizarre world, from the safe distance of words on paper.

Like their creator, *The Bone Cage*’s protagonists, Sadie and Digger, defy pigeonholing, setting many stereotypes about athletes on their heads with regard to fame, relationships, happiness and identity. Swimmer Sadie, and Digger, an 85-kilo wrestler are in preparation for the 2000 Olympics in Sydney. Through her characters, Abdou explores the athletes’ tumbles from ascetic grace in pursuit of excellence, clichés in hand as mantras to tune out distraction. Sadie draws on autobiographical elements of the author’s own experience, having obtained an English degree while swimming competitively, reciting verse to herself during laps and toting around a copy of *Paradise Lost*.

The Bone Cage could easily be a transposition of Milton’s classic into a modern-day Eden at the University of Calgary’s Kinesiology complex, home to the characters and their codependent coaches.

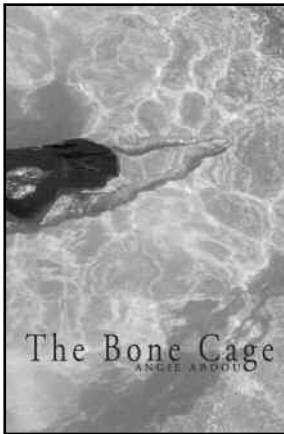
Abdou gives numerous examples of athletes’ love/hate relationship with authority, and is unafraid to put patronizing medical professionals and coaches in their places. *The Bone Cage* creates an ironic paradise full of verbal abuse and social deprivation, a chosen wonderland where the inhabitants have a distant memory of the happiness that drew them there in the first place. From their cages,



Angie Abdou

Sadie and Digger begin to allow themselves glimpses outward, to a world where bodies fail and merit is decided on more blurry factors than time or points.

Rather than declaring sport as evil, Abdou invites the reader to vacillate between the worship and devastation of sport by competitors, coaches, media and the athletes’ family members. The hells of intense training and emotional train wrecks wrought by broken dreams contrast with the perfect, singular focus of Abdou’s swimming and wrestling scenes. “Autopilot,” is how Sadie describes her state of nothingness during competition, “[...]more like mind control, turning off the senses you don’t need. Zoom in. Close the doors to everything else.” Abdou’s hallmark kinesthetic writing for her less-familiar sport of wrestling was achieved by submitting to multiple gut-wrenches by her Olympian brother. As with the ultimate temptation that results in



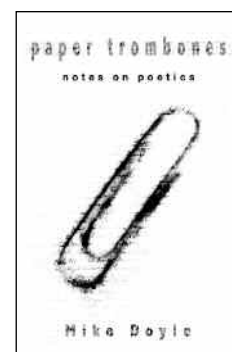
The Bone Cage.
Angie Abdou.
Edmonton: NeWest
Press, 2007

Adam and Eve’s expulsion from Eden, Abdou’s athletes face the very human struggle to resist all detractors from the paradise of superhuman achievement, and the daunting task of defining themselves and their relationships after retirement.

A defiance of of the body’s authority is what begets these achievements, as the novel’s title – a nod to Beowulf – implies. *The Bone Cage* offers the unacquainted a unique opportunity to step into an athlete’s body for the duration of their read. The strong narration of two different omniscients, a coarse, jesting wrestler and a more lithe, (mostly) literary swimmer, alternates each chapter, between Sadie’s and Digger’s stories, evolving from dogmatic to ambiguous as the athletes’ directions post-Olympics become less clear. Olympic wrestlers’ and swimmers’ freakish physical features – large hands, broad shoulders and hairy legs, for both Sadie and Digger – are a celebrated bonding ground. Along with the protagonists, the reader itches and exhales, feels washes of relief and stabs of injury, and walks the perilous tightrope of good, exertional pain over the mire of injury. Abdou spares the reader no insight into the vulgarity of an athlete’s being – these characters are real, from their prowess right down to their odour. Shades of Abdou’s short story collection, *Anything Boys Can Do*, appear in her novel’s female characters, who find themselves at times unable to transcend their vulnerability to the body’s cravings, unabashedly going after sexual conquests as though they were medals or personal bests.

The numerous tensions in the minds, bodies and lives of Sadie, Digger and their fellow athletes are well-crafted by Abdou, who avoids straying into melodramatic one-sidedness. The refreshing self-awareness of Digger and Sadie makes this novel accessible and appealing to a broad audience, which was a goal of Abdou’s. In doing so, however, the conspicuous explanations of her characters’ clichés somewhat hinder their irony. Regardless of a reader’s life experience, *The Bone Cage* offers an honest and non-linear search for wholeness, recognizable by anyone who has been dealt a change of life focus.

Heather Kerr is a graduate of UBC’s School of Rehabilitation Science who competes in swimming and triathlon.



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Literary Criticism /
Memoir
160 Pages
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Paper Trombones: Notes on Poetics

a memoir by Mike Doyle

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

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

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RADIANCE

Linda Rogers

The other side of the most famous lines in Canadian poetry might be, “There is a crack in everything/ that’s how the dark gets in.” Shaena Lambert’s second book, the profile of a girl who lost and found her face courtesy of Uncle Sam, is a profile of the mushroom shadow that brought the world to its knees.

We used to declaim wars that would end all wars, but now we know that one failure of mercy is inevitably the precursor to the next. Civilization’s biggest single cowardly act was arguably the bombing of Hiroshima. At least the victims of the holocaust and more recent genocide have been able to look *their* persecutor’s in the face. “Fat Boy” just fell out of the sky, making the word “radiant” an obscenity for all time.

Keiko has been brought to New York by the Hiroshima Project to have her radiation scars removed by a plastic surgeon who appears to a fetishistic attachment to disfigurement. The project committee has an agenda to use her for propaganda against testing the hydrogen bomb. Everyone in the story with no redemption is corrupt, even the victim herself. She survived the Atom bomb because she lied. The dissembling Hiroshima Maiden fits right into the Stepford mentality of McCarthy’s America.

Lambert captures the buttoned down ambiance of the Fifties in the opening pages of this book, and it is not attractive. There is no one to like in the story. Daisy, the housewife is a self-absorbed schlump. Her husband, a narcissistic writer for *The Whistler*, a cold war radio show, is a numb drunk. The despicable committee members use the scarred girl to forward their reputations. No wonder Keiko, who dissembles like the archetypal fox of her dreams, is closed to them.

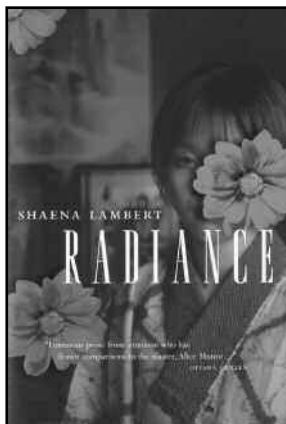
The most pathetic in her greed for Keiko is Daisy, the Home Mother whose need for the already depleted child is beyond disturbing. Daisy has miscarried. She wants a child. There isn’t enough of Keiko left to fill her need, but she perseveres desperately. Daisy’s grief and longing is jarring in the comic book landscape of her controlled suburb. There is no room for the jagged edges of grief in Riverside Meadows, where Daisy lives. It is inevitable that she will be surgically expiated, like Keiko’s persistent cars.

It is in the sequences where film noir segues into Keiko’s memories of Japan that Lambert allows her lyric voice to soar. Hiroshima is not Brigadoon, but it is a beautiful sorrow, as is Keiko, who recognizes that her disfigurement is more than skin deep. She is ruined. Her world is ruined, and her dreams are eloquent. They have so much more validity than Lambert’s foreground reality.

We now perceive the Fifties as *Terry and The Pirates*, *Dick Tracy* and *Katy Keene* comics. Numb by depression and war, its denizens lived a narrative flatline dictated by the divisive politics that have marked America from the moment its Pilgrims set foot in the New World and began to burn witches and take advantage of the indigent peoples. The novel’s post-apocalyptic landscape is the field in which modern realities were sewn. Is Lambert telling us that evolution, even survival, is impossible in such aridity?

Radiance is bereft of light. The final scene between Daisy and Keiko, apparently reconciled in a sad café, offers bare relief and no redemption. In comic books, the good guys win, but there are no good guys in *Radiance*, except for “Fat Boy” who may have brought the message that the only mercy is mercy killing.

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



Radiance
Shaena Lambert,
Random House, 2007,
323 pages, hardcover,
\$32.95



Shaena Lambert

LOUISIANA (continued from page 18)

not.”

The only sour note in the book is the prissy, old-fashioned deletion of letters in the word “f—ing,” which calls more attention to itself than if it had been spelled out.

From Shreveport to New Orleans, from Monroe to Lake Charles, *Louisiana in Words* is a veritable gumbo of moods, viewpoints, epiphanies, pastorals, nocturnes, customs, rituals. It is a feast for the senses and the imagination. I wish that I could include samples of other writers whose work is impressive: Donna Pucciani, Leslie Alexander, Katy Reckdahl, Patrick Burke, Claire Joller, to name a few.

In a state geographically blest with an abundance of wetlands, and subtropical flora and fauna, there is no mention of the hurricanes that annually devastate the entire Gulf Coast region. However, the editor footnotes Katheryn Laborde’s story of a night-time flood that took place one week before Hurricane Katrina made landfall in Louisiana.

All in all, Joshua Clark has good reason to feel proud of *Louisiana in Words*. This grass-roots anthology is splendidly informed with simplicity of language and the sense of life as it is lived.

Louisiana is a place that one never leaves no matter where one is.

Len Gasparini lives in Toronto. The author of numerous books of poetry, in 1990 he was awarded the F.G. Bressani Literary Prize. He has also published a story collection, *Blind Spot*, and a collection for children, *I Once Had a Pet Praying Mantis*.

STENSON (continued from page 19)

This naming cements them, pulls life experience out of the romantic notions we sometimes carry of life. Finally, there is James Joyce’s *Ulysses* here too in funerals and pubs and “Who was it today and how did it go?” in the poem “Details”.

Though there were a few poems where I felt the last line, or bit of the last line could have been left off, to be fair I also felt that those parts are so human, they are the bits where, dare I say, the poet is giving herself a hard time for whatever part she may feel she has had in these lines of grief. They are also the bits of Stenson’s poems where a touch of the unchangeable inevitability of life has its say – “...sounds we hear when we sleep, furnace, fridge, fact.” That word “fact” says oh so much.

In this fine second collection there is an evocative lightness to the poems, not light in their approach to each poem or even each word but a lightness that comes over the reader – as when listening to *Ode to Joy* one senses the sorrow in the song but also the celebration of that sorrow; a recognition that each experience is intertwined and emotionally rich.

Yvonne Blomer was born in Bindura, Zimbabwe and has lived in Japan and most recently in the United Kingdom. In 2006 her first collection of poetry *a broken mirror, fallen leaf* was released by Ekstasis Editions. She has settled in Victoria, BC (for now).

SAVAGE DETECTIVES (continued from page 24)

stooping to rolling old men. Kunst continually writes, “my good friend Ulises,” as in, “Only then did I see clearly that they wanted to kill my good friend Ulises.”

But Ulises is as good (or perhaps better) with a knife as with a pen, and lives on. Ulises, the unsuccessful poet, appears to be the darker side of the central theme in this portrait of the artist as vagabond. Or is he?

Both Arturo and Ulises had been leading lights in the ‘Visceral Realism’ movement of the 1970s (surely both a taunt at Gabriel Marquez’s Magic Realism, and a clue as to the book’s style), and while Arturo manages to stay afloat in this material world of reality, Ulises doesn’t seem to have learned to swim at all in those waters.

Whether these character voices are based on real people or not, Bolaño portrays them full of life, whether it’s María, the body-building fighter who lets Arturo a room in Catalina; or Jacobo, an Argentine photographer who befriends him in Luanda, Africa; or Mary Watson, who meets him on her hitch-hiking trek through France and Spain. We can see their lives vividly, as we watch Arturo’s life unfold through them.

The third section, *The Sonora Desert*, continues the diary of García Madero and the car chase back in early 1976. It elaborates what happened to the two poets, their finding of Cesárea Tinajero, the founder of visceral realism, and more.

The Savage Detectives is an important work. It is written from the soul, and it experiments with form, content and style. My advice is that after buying, borrowing or stealing this book, take a week off everything and hide away in a cabin somewhere to read it.

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

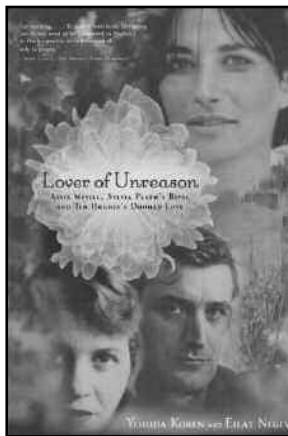
LOVER OF UNREASON

Linda Rogers

In that Ted Hughes assiduously cultivated his own image as the bereft survivor of irrational partners, it is only fair that biographers would investigate the stories of the women who loved him. Assia Wevill was the pregnant “other woman” when poet Sylvia Plath put her head in the oven one winter day in the chaotic Sixties. By the end of the decade, she too had killed herself, and worse, took Shura, the reluctantly acknowledged child of her relationship with Hughes, with her.

I knew a shell-shocked Ted Hughes, paranoid, damaged, obsessed with his reputation and the protection of his two children with Plath. The conventional wisdom was that this gifted man had been attracted to brilliant but unstable women. Plath had attempted suicide in her adolescence. Wevill, a “homeless” German Jew, was a collateral victim of the Holocaust. It wasn’t his fault.

Assia, with her chosen epitaph, “Lover of Unreason,” summed it up. The book that takes her words for its title is more about Hughes than either of the two women, both of whom made the fatal mistake of standing in his light. For some unreason, women suffer from the belief that men of genius will imbue them with immortality. I call it genius by injection. What they fail to



Lover of Unreason, Assia Wevill, Sylvia Plath's Rival and Ted Hughes Doomed Love, Yehuda Koren and Eilat Negev, 2007, hardcover, 280 pages, \$34.95

realise is that poets are no more sensitive, kind, or fair than ordinary men. Both Sylvia and Assia learned this the hard way. They were both lovers of unreason, accepting unreasonable conditions in their private lives and then finding a tragic way out.

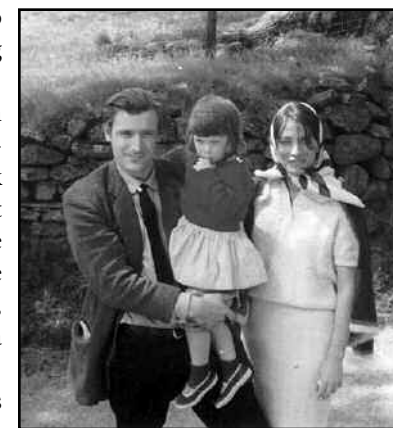
Sylvia left behind poetry, diaries and an unfinished novel. Hughes saw fit to destroy all but the poetry, “for the sake of the children.” One wonders if he ever stopped to wonder if they might want to know their mother and the reasons for her decision to leave them so violently. A mutual friend told me that Frieda Hughes, shown with her fingers in her mouth in a photo in the book, still had that habit as a young woman. That may be her answer.

Assia wanted to be buried in an English churchyard, home at last after a lifetime wandering from Germany to Israel to Canada and back to England. Hughes had her cremated, her last wish denied. Now she has *Lover of Unreason*, the book, and that will have to do. In the book, she is presented as people knew her, beautiful, charismatic, lazy, sensual, but most important, a loving mother.

On the news this morning, there was another story of a mother committing suicide and killing her child. Why do women, directed as we are biologically to protect our young, commit these acts? Koren and Negev cite statistics that show most mothers who murder their children think they have no other option. Since Hughes had apparently refused to provide for Shura or show her the love she needed, Wevill had no reason to believe he would raise her in kindness.

The Hughes they portray, self-absorbed, somewhat confused by his own cruel and indiscriminate sexuality, and fixed on his reputation as a poet, is the man I knew. I remember a group of poets, one of whom was his friend the great Israeli writer

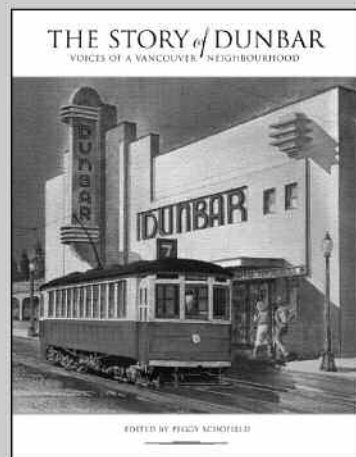
(continued on page 30)



Assia Wevill and Ted Hughes with Shura

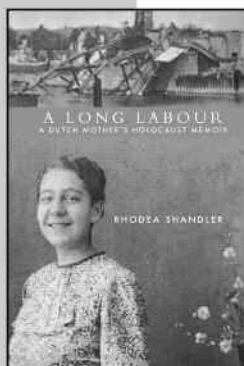
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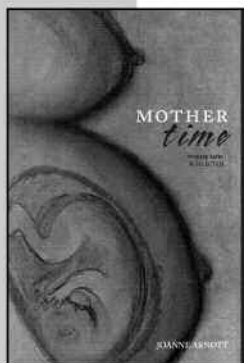


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THE BONE SHARPS

Mary Jo Anderson

This may seem an odd way to begin a review of a novel by award-winning Canadian poet, Tim Bowling – I can't help but think if Michael Ondaatje's name was on the cover of this new novel, *The Bone Sharps*, it would be at the top of the bestsellers list.

As this exquisite, poetic, fascinating novel is written by Bowling and published by Gaspereau Press in Nova Scotia, it may be hard pressed to find a large readership. Which would be the reader's loss.

As I read this novel, I thought of how very similar the professions of paleontologist and novelist (or poet) are. Both work in often solitary, demanding conditions, digging into the unknown, praying to mine valuable fragments, which they can then assemble into a whole creature. The paleontologist seeks bones to recreate a skeleton of a prehistoric dinosaur, so unfamiliar to us as to seem an imagined being. A novelist seeks pieces of prose and characters to recreate an imagined world, so familiar to us as to seem real.

Tim Bowling has crafted a novel of complexity, subtly and great beauty. The fact that much of the novel causes us to witness carnage – of the First World War, slaughter of aboriginal peoples, desecration of wild environments – but still leaves us with an aching sense of the wonder of the world, says much for Bowling's talents.

The Bone Sharps is based on the life and work of Charles Sternberg, a paleontologist renowned for his fossil finds in the vast, seemingly empty, tracts of the west. The title refers to the term by which these fossil hunters were called. But the term 'bone sharps' resonates through the story. Bones become visible everywhere. Passages are layered like the stratified limestone or shale (in what was once an ocean bed in Kansas) through which Sternberg scoured for bones. We now know, through science, that these fossils may be as old as 85 million years. But imagine the astonishment, incredulity even, that the finding of fossilized fish, turtles, and platypus-like creatures, in this ancient seabed would have caused.

The novel begins in 1916 when Sternberg is sixty-seven years old, and in poor health. He is camped, with his entourage, in the Red Deer Valley of Alberta. The group includes his sons, also fossil hunters, and a young woman, Lilly, who is needed to fill the space left by the men called to fight in the war.

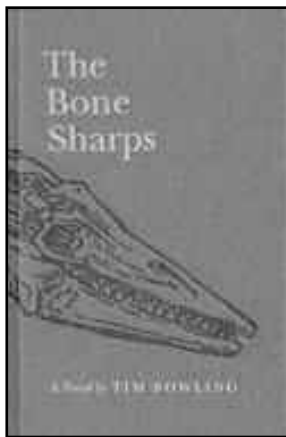
One such young man is Scott Cameron, a protégé of Sternberg's who is in the trenches in France dreaming of Lilly, of fossil hunting, and of returning to work with Sternberg.

Sternberg is dreaming also, and his dreams are disturbed, ragged. He is haunted by the death of his young daughter, Maud, who died before Sternberg was able to return from a field trip.

In alternating chapters, the stories of Sternberg, Cameron, and Lilly are told and delineated by the year in which that part of the story takes place. Like his name, part of Sternberg is stern – with his sons, himself, Lilly. He is devout, and authoritarian. Through the lens of his devout religiosity Sternberg sees the fossils as evidence of God's greatness and power.

Bowling creates the era exceptionally well. The language and the pacing of the novel transport us to the world in which Sternberg lived. The very landscape of the badlands is covered with hoodoos, the odd geologic formations that resemble the vertebrae of dinosaurs, which are always found within their topography. So too, the very syntax, language of the book, conjures the period and is the skeleton supports this story.

This is one of the novel's great gifts, to allow us to know and imagine how the world thought and flowed at the end of the 1800's as it crashed into the new century. The discoveries of science, the barbarity of war, the slow seep of Darwin's thoughts of evolution into the culture – all that we know in our bones, of this history – is made to seem new, challenging the order of the world, needing to be absorbed, as it is for



The Bone Sharps
Tim Bowling
Gaspereau Press,
312 pages,
\$27.95, US \$25.95



Tim Bowling

Sternberg, Cameron and the others.

At the beginning of the novel, Sternberg talks with his dead daughter Maud in dreams. He tells her, "Daughter, everything is planned and ordered by the creator. Never doubt it. What happens is meant to happen, is for the best. Do you think we would be here in this valley, finding the bones of His great ancient creations if He had not ordained it so?"

But in truth, Sternberg is assailed by doubts. The loss of his daughter has shaken his faith. As well, Sternberg has witnessed the genocide of tribes of aboriginal peoples. His travels to find fossils coincided with the expansion into the west, which resulted in clashes between the "whites" and "Indians".

On one particular expedition, Sternberg meets Crazy Horse. But at the time of the meeting, Sternberg only knows the man as the enigmatic, taciturn leader of a group who happen upon Sternberg as he uncovers the bones of a *mosasaur*.

The book progresses through time, and reveals the events in the lives of Sternberg, his mentor, Edward Cope, Lily, the young soldier Scott Cameron, and Crazy Horse.

At midpoint in the book, in a passage set in 1916, the elder Sternberg wanders away from the field camp and becomes disoriented and affected by the heat.

The sun raged, silently, without motion. The air was transparent stone. Sternberg felt he had to shift huge blocks as he cautiously descended to the valley floor, finding footholds where he could, straining to see through the mosquitoes. The stone rang beneath his feet, a sort of insect hum without insects.

Sternberg's experience resembles the "vision quest" or "fasting for visions" that Crazy Horse and others would have observed.

The only caveat I can express about the novel is that the ending seems rushed and out of tempo with the rest of the book. The story dissolves into smaller fragments – bone chips.

Bowling's poem, "The Book Collector," appeared in the Spring 2007 issue of *Fiddlehead* magazine and won the Ralph Gustafson Poetry Prize. In the final line of this poem Bowling uses the phrase, "eternal ligatures". His novel, *The Bone Sharps* examines the ligatures that hold a person, a culture, and an epoch together, against the landscape of eternity.

Mary Jo Anderson owned *Frog Hollow Books* in Halifax, and now writes features and reviews.

LOVER OF UNREASON (continued from page 29)

Yehuda Amichai, quoting Hughes description of women as overly sentimental, "maudlin, melodramatic and manipulative." No wonder the feminists got mad.

From the book, it appears Hughes was always secretive and dishonest with women, even before the repercussions blackened his legend, a phenomenon that he ascribed to "rabid feminists." I was told to be very careful not to assume a friendly tone in my letters to him, which were all about literary business we had together. At the time, I found this odd, but then his last wife had reason to be suspicious. The amusements I remember were visiting animals in captivity and women stripping in bars. This is the womanizer described by Wevill's biographers, who appear to have put good use to research materials not destroyed or secreted by Hughes.

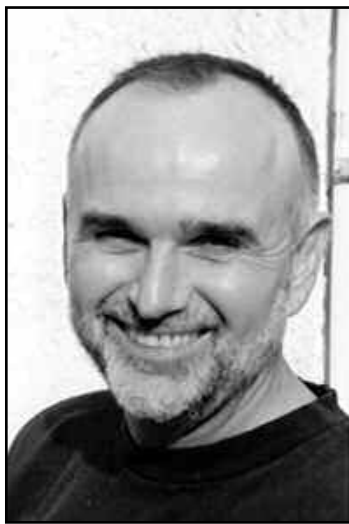
The only discrepancy I found in *Lovers of Unreason* was a reference to Assia's affair with Earl Birney, (Oh, those poets!) while in the Creative Writing Department at UBC in the Fifties. I believe I was in the first Creative Writing year, and that was 1962.

Plath and Wevill died tragically young, bewitched by the muse that possessed their lover. Hughes, like the ancient mariner, never wrote his way to peace. The sad thing is that children are affected by the shortcomings of their parents. The real victims of these narcissistic people are their progeny, who deserved better. For readers interested in the lives of two major poets and one stunning acolyte of beauty, *Lover of Unreason* may be the closest reading of the time when their doomed existences intersected.

Linda Rogers is completing her *Victoria trilogy* that begins with *The Empress Letters*. She is a frequent contributor to *The Pacific Rim Review of Books*.

MOTHER IS AN ALIEN (continued from page 17)

both as a film and as a historical figure to significantly redirect the course of his own life. Planting a tree and naming it Gandhi may seem rather trite or superfluous, but neither is the case here. Although distanced from his Ukrainian Catholic origins, Melnyk still finds deep meaning in daily prayer and meditation. The tree Gandhi serves as the locus for both inward peace and outward purpose. Since it is alive, it connects with reality in a way neither the film nor a photo of the man could. But it is the film *Gandhi* and Ben Kingsly's exceptional performance within it that provides the roots, as it were, for this renewed spiritual focus. It is a tool for opening understanding and self-awareness, its impact manifesting in resolutions, a tangible metaphor, and a symbiotic relationship. "Because Gandhi the tree is present in my home, I find myself coming back to Gandhi the man in ways that I would not have if there was no tree named Gandhi in my life," states the author.



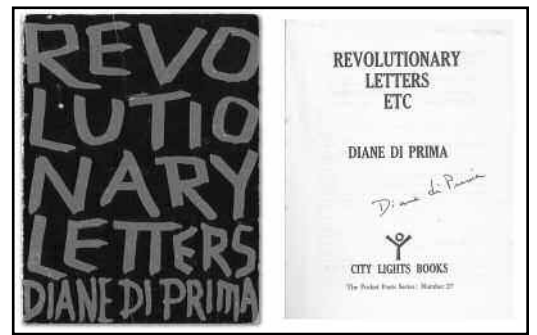
George Melnyk

This is the essence of *My Mother is an Alien: Ten Takes on Life and Film*, a book only casually concerned about the films that make up its initial subject matter. "I believe that the reader will see in these essays how the smallest details of a film evoke the greatest meaning for a viewer...our embracing a film allows it, in turn, to encompass us and make us more human." In this stated intent, the book succeeds. I feel little connection to *Das Boot*, but through Melnyk's reflections I've come to better understand why one particular part of *Black Hawk Down* is such an essential expression of a consuming force within my own life. That sense of self-discovery is not commonplace among the tens of thousands of pages we read within our lives. It is, therefore, something special to find it within the 144 pages from George Melnyk that crossed my desk as an assignment, but became much more.

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.

DI PRIMA (continued from page 14)

what the elderly Italian lady down the hall might think about prices in the bakery or the market, and if we talked to the black lady nearby we could probably come up with a plan like, for the block, but that just isn't how I was thinking—that big. Maybe that's what men do. Women are different because we're mothers—we deal with issues right here in front of us, on the ground. Maybe all of us old grannies ought to get together and just rip the world apart and change it. Pain or death don't matter to us anymore."



The City Lights Books edition of Revolutionary letters

If defiance runs through the early revolutionary poems, it gives way to the long view of compassion even in the face of war in the more recent works. Fear though, di Prima relates, was a motivating factor in the earlier pieces.

"The generation of today feels that is scared, but we were the most scared people in the universe during the writing of these early poems. Coming out of the 1950s, the Cold War, we were *scared*. We didn't talk but to the 20 people we trusted. With the Neocons I see that scaredness coming back, but it ain't worth it. There's plenty to be scared of because there are maniacs running the universe, but I tell young people especially, *It Isn't Worth It*. When the time came for me, I went out on the streets and said what I had to say. Before that, we holed up and just talked about it among ourselves. Remember, in the late Fifties there were maybe hundreds of us that could network across the nation; that's all, hundreds. Yet, we could make things happen and it changed the world. With the internet, with all the new technologies that younger people have at their disposal, the opportunities for networking and sharing information and ideas there's so much more that can happen now. So we've got to be hopeful. I'm optimistic."

Trevor Carolan is the international editor of PRRB.

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ARMAGEDDON (continued from page 9)

By focusing the work exclusively on Pandora, Alexander forecloses on more expansive interactions that would depict her from other eyes – and for whose loss he substitutes a near incantatory repetition of allusions and spells that mutes the more it is used. At the same time, Alexander provides little arc to the drama that entralls Pandora, and what may come of it. Which leaves this reader with a question that Alexander raises, if implicitly, then takes leave of: To what end the difference between a fictive chronology of an event (our customary novel) and a poetic eruption framed as a novel that eschews externality? This is not a question of stylistic or structural stratagems; it concerns the evolution of the emotional conflicts at stake — however portrayed — and what allows the reader to enter them, even to adopt them as his or her own, in whole or in part, toward their final form. And it revolves around poignancy: of how to reveal it for those willing to meet you where, and when, you wish them to.

This question also highlights a weakness in Alexander's book in regard to *reciprocity*; the kind of reciprocity between author and reader that raises the stakes, and makes of the reading an encounter that clarifies and deepens.

That this book is a summation of sorts of Alexander's interests, that it revives a sense that our epoch now blindly, now clearly, approaches a verge *sans* retreat, is clear. That the leap implied entails species transformation for Alexander, with prophecy its lifeblood, returns me to the character of the writing, to Pandora, and the lens that mutates within her. Is she here or there, now or then, partly temporal, spatial, sexual, intellectual, mythic, eschatological – this woman in becoming inspired by absolute divergence? Even so, I hesitate to use the term *absolute* for fear of already having lost Pandora within it. Human frailty is not a shadow game played out against absolutes save as an intimate drama to secure some *living space*. All the rest is history and theory. I would like to believe that Alexander agrees with me here.

Sunrise in Armageddon offers an infusion of risk and vibrato; its light pregnant, its heat real. Nor does it fade quickly but smolders into dusk: blood red, green blue. Despite its faults, and with all its variable densities by turns transparent and opaque, it is a book that will draw readers for whom an *oracular birthing* strikes home.

Allan Graubard is a poet, playwright and critic. His play, For Alejandra, premiered in New York, Washington, DC, and Dubrovnik, Croatia, summer 2002. In June 2003, the play was translated into Romanian and presented and published at the Sibiu International Theater Festiva, Romania, along with a national radio broadcast.

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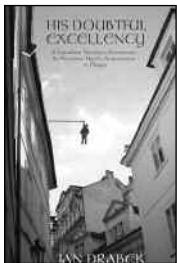
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Cornelia Hornosty has lived in Ontario for 28 years and has been living in Victoria since 1995. She has published three previous collections of poetry and a chapbook.

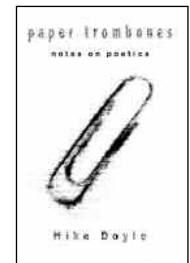
PAPER TROMBONES NOTES ON POETICS

MIKE DOYLE

The text centres on the craft of poetry, others' and my own. That being so, it's a memoir, in anecdotes, of a life in poetry, which in my mind I've called 'the other life', the one not confined to earning a crust. As a sketchy memoir, it does not avoid a certain amount of ego-tripping and name-dropping; after all I haven't lived in a vacuum, but in a world where one must fend for oneself.

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).



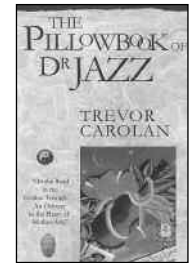
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Trevor Carolan is the author of Giving Up Poetry: With Allen Ginsberg At Hollyhock, as well as books of poetry, including Celtic Highway. He teaches writing at UCFV and lives in Deep Cove, BC.



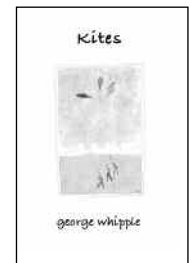
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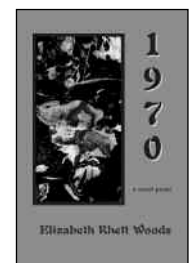
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ELIZABETH RHETT WOODS

Draft-dodgers, Viet Nam, literature and LSD, love affairs, liaisons and leavings – each has their season in a year scarred by the Kent State tragedies and the War Measures Act. Against this backdrop the poet traces an interior landscape of restlessness and renewal.

Elizabeth Rhett Woods has published four other books of poetry and three novels. She lives in Victoria.



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