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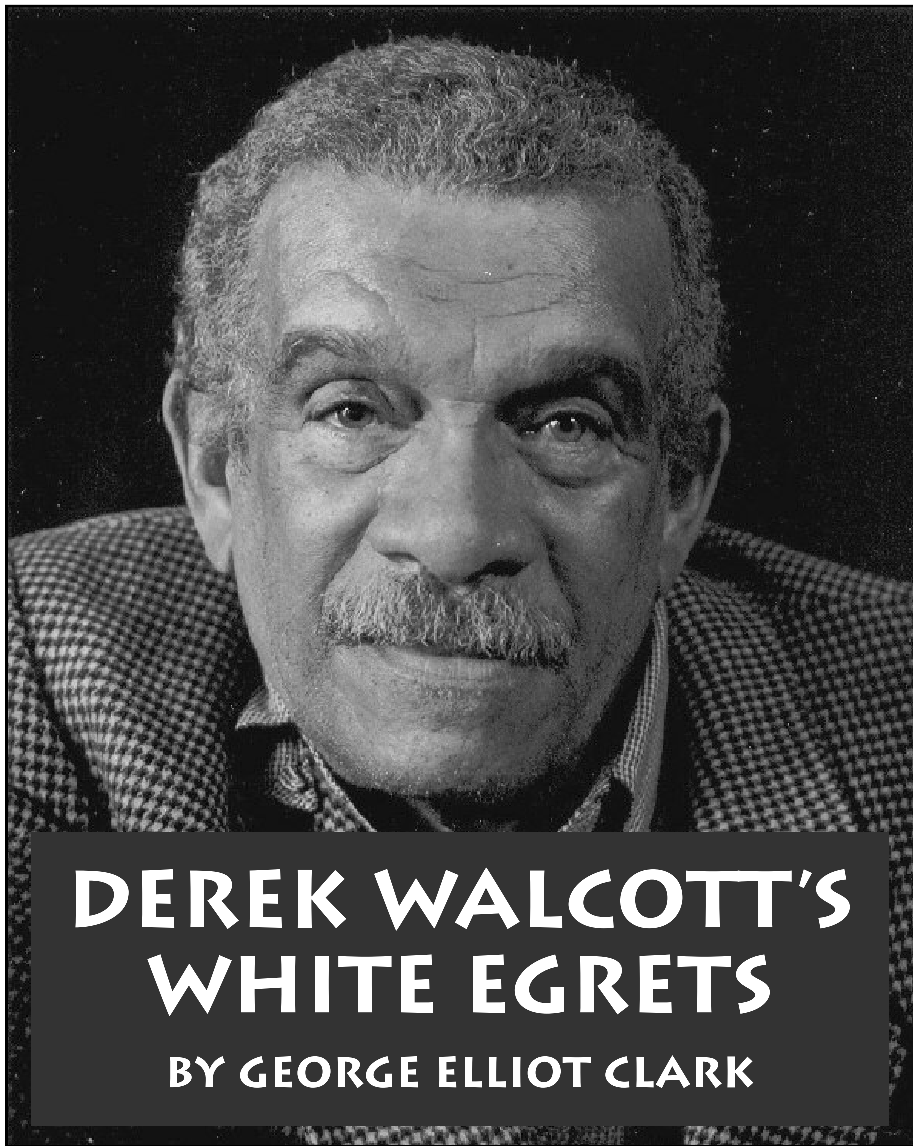
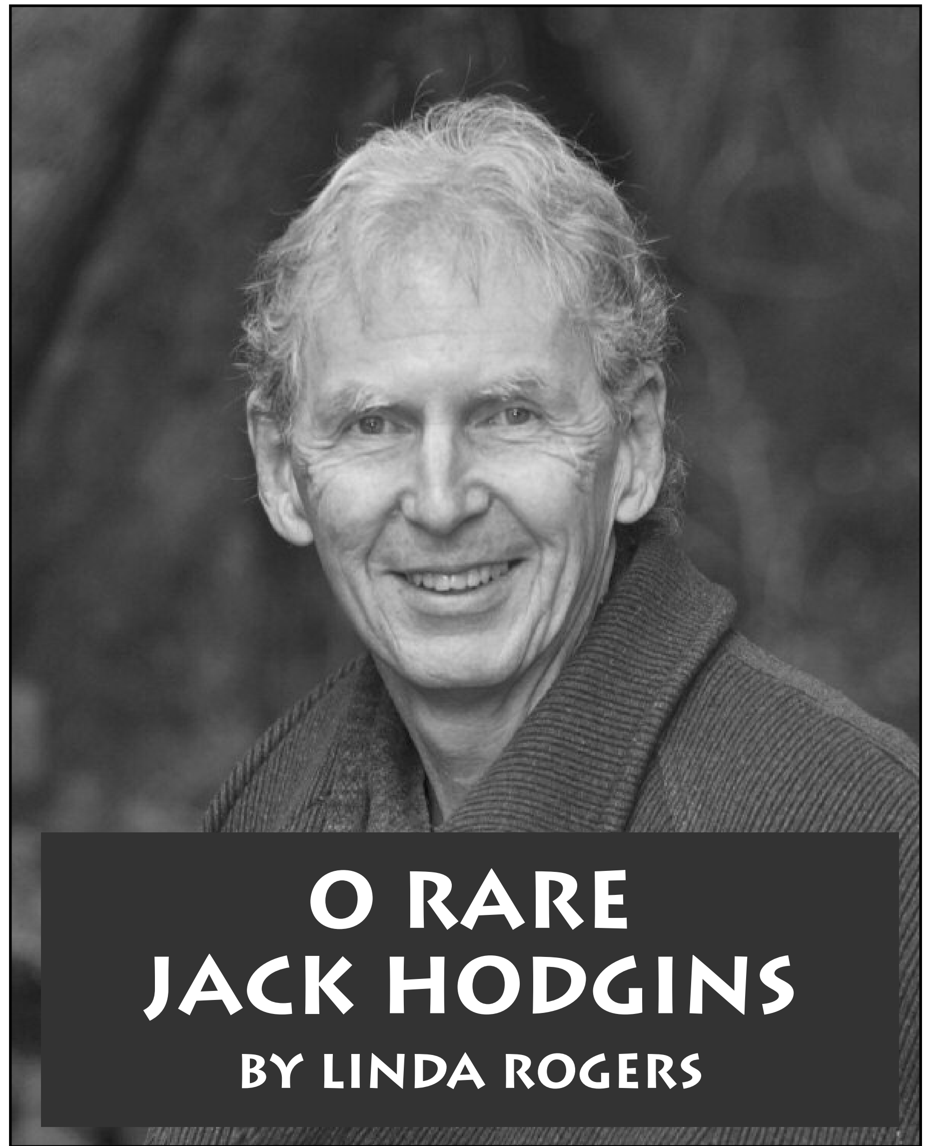
AN AUTUMN HARVEST OF WRITERS & BOOKS



DEREK WALCOTT'S WHITE EGRETS
BY GEORGE ELLIOT CLARK

Derek Walcott



O RARE JACK HODGINS
BY LINDA ROGERS

Jack Hodgins

JAMES REID OPENS THE BOX ON ANNE CARSON'S NOX

REG LITTLE ON WALL STREET AND THE DEATH OF THE AMERICAN CENTURY

RICHARD WIRICK ON ROGER ROSENBLATT

PAUL NELSON PONDERS MICHAEL MCCLURE

BERT ALMON REVIEWS MICHAEL LONGLEY'S COLLECTED POEMS

ERIC SPALDING & RICHARD STEVENSON ON PAUL QUARRINGTON AND MUSIC

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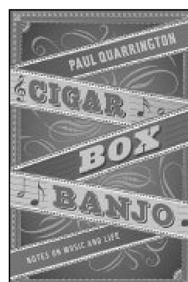
This issue of the
Pacific Rim Review of Books
is dedicated to the memory of
Paul Quarrington (1953-2010).
Playwright, novelist, screenwriter,
filmmaker and musician.
He will be missed.



Cigar Box Banjo: Notes on Music and Life
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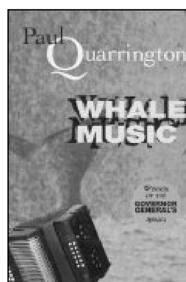

Whale Music
Random House of Canada

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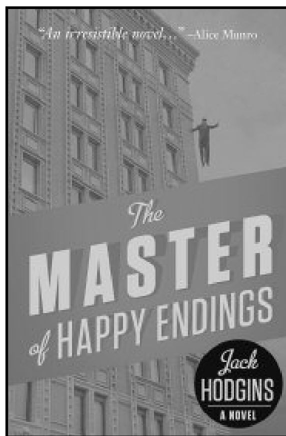
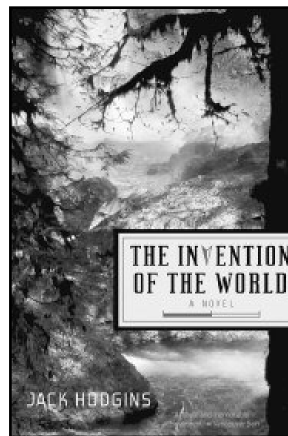
O Rare Jack Hodgins

Linda Rogers

We often hear the common reader expressing the wish to re-visit favourite books during those armchair years when life is remembered and savoured. "I plan to read Murasaski (or Chaucer) again," they promise themselves with the understanding that the experience will be richer when absorbed from a mature perspective. Now we have bookends to make life simpler for Jack Hodgins aficionados, a re-issue of his first novel, aptly named *The Invention of the World,* and the publication of *The Master of Happy Endings,* his modern Lear appropriately a bushed scholar.



The Master of Happy Endings
Jack Hodgins
Thomas Allen, 2010
$32.95



The Invention of the World
Jack Hodgins
Ronsdale Press re-issue
2010, $18.95

Hodgins, who has often been compared to writers like Thomas Hardy and William Faulkner, who made memorable characters out of unique settings, was born into a parenthesis, a time when world war marked the beginning of the end of the modern age. The parenthesis is still open and he sees what is coming, a world that needs re-inventing at least from the human perspective. We did not invent the Earth, but we did create a society fraught with reminders of human fallibility.

That fallibility has been brought forward with high-seriousness in the human comedies written by Hodgins, whose societal view is tolerant, coloured by the Aristotelian understanding that we are surrounded by perfection, but often trip over the evidence as it reveals itself.

Hodgins' fictional world is the Northwest Rainforest, a place already defined in the spirit religion and iconography of our First Nations. His characters, all "bushed" in different ways, stumble out that tradition. They are carved from trees and the spirits speak through them, even though they are imperfect channels. As we read the stories, we can identify Dzunuk'wa, Wild Woman of the Woods, who gathers children in a basket and feeds those who deserve to be fed, and Raven the trickster, his laughter bouncing from branch to branch. The wry but compassionate author has spent his lifetime defining a new post-contact forest mythology that respects what came before. The river flows through it and hopefully we might learn from the river.

The Invention of the World is an ironic title. We are an arrogant species who, in the post-Renaissance view, regard other orders as adversaries to overcome. In order to justify this, we invented the notions of good and evil. Man is good. The sea that swallows sailors is evil. The animals that attack humans to protect their young are evil. We are the higher intelligence and we will use that power to control the oceans and winds and flora and fauna that exist only as a setting for human society.

Now we hear Raven laughing. All along, he knew that was untrue.

So many settlers came to the New World expecting a Utopian outcome. Life would be better here. They'd civilize the unknown forest and, metaphor of all metaphors, turn its trees into paper to spread our message. British Columbia has attracted a number of messianic characters who led their vulnerable brethren into the woods from which they sometimes emerge to tell their stories. The notion of ideal community, the carrot that lured their ancestors to these shores, was reprised in the Sixties when young urbanites returned to the land, establishing communes that by and large failed for the same reasons their predecessors had. This is the backdrop for Hodgins' post-hippy assessment. By the late Seventies, the great experiment had gone South, the hottest place in our collective imagination, in Wild Woman's legendary basket.

Because we don't seem to absorb our lessons, the lessons bear repeating. Because Hodgins delivers them with compassionate laughter, the reader opens up to a greater understanding.

Maggie, who has taken over the dilapidated remains of The Revelations Colony of Truth, a doubtful concept, is an earth mother of doubtful provenance. She has loved and gained. The residue of her careless and random affection is children who grow in a garden of neglect. Still, Maggie, never a virgin mother, has holy aspirations:

It would be exciting to drop off pounds of lard, to peel the fat off layer by layer, and get so thin eventually that they would have to wire you to the earth to keep you from ascending to the sky, floating right up out of sight because there wasn't enough of you left for gravity to get hold of. She could see herself, going up in the air like a slow rocket, ascending perpendicular, and all encircled in light like one of those saint people, pure spirit, while flesh and bones lay heavy on the ground like discarded clothes.

Hodgins description of Maggie's unsanctified holy ambitions is masterful. At the same time she is innocent and grotesque. The stage is set.

One of Maggie's kids is getting married. The mayhem that intrudes on the wedding preparations foreshadows the inevitable desecration of this union. We are ready for trouble, as is Raven, the ventriloquist, who throws the voices of brides and grooms, murderers and murdered, from the upper branches of a cedar tree, beyond reach.

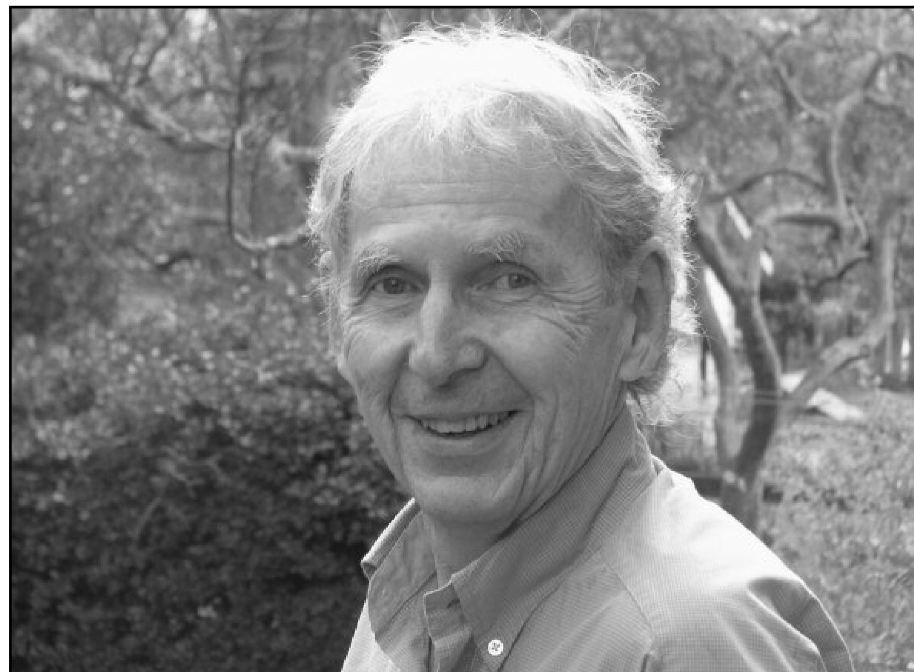
Raven has seen it all before. He is omniscient and has been in this wood forever, and in all the other woods in the world, even Ireland where this tale started when a young woman died giving birth to the monstrous founder of the Colony of Truth who split himself into two parts, Good and Evil, that would keep popping up, generation after generation, just like Cain and Abel in the first mythical garden. This is a game of round and round, birth, copulation and death, fall and redemption, witnessed by Wild Woman, Mad Mother Thomas in this version of the creation and recreation story.

No one is surprised when Maggie marries Wade, the new incarnation of the mythical good brother. The reader is given clues to Wade recognition. He is either one of those supernatural beings that tore off its face to endow humans with special gifts or he is a human chosen to receive it: "It's only an ugly mask you're wearing just to spite me, his mother said, "And someday I'll find a way of zipping it off you."

Maggie and Wade are no fairytale couple. They are in fact the anti-heroic, a slut and a sloth. "There were people," Hodgins wrote, "who chose to live as if no one had invented civilization. They were people who chose to ignore everything that humanity had done to improve life over thousands of years." This, we are beginning to realize, might be a good thing.

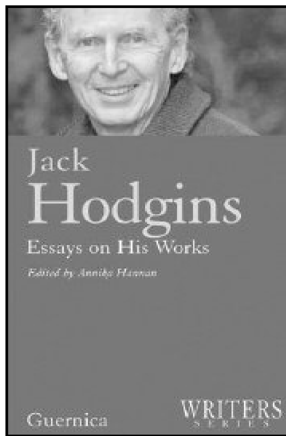
Wade is not charismatic, but he is kind. That is enough for Maggie, now. The wedding feast is spiced with enough sex and violence to last a lifetime, but lifetimes are short. This is a story that has no ending, because there is only one story and it keeps repeating itself. In his layering of legend, Hodgins began his career as a novelist with this branding: cast and plot are reliably predictable, but the details reinvent themselves to keep the story endlessly entertaining.

The Master of Happy Endings may be reporting the positive outcome of this marriage, even though the characters have changed. There is a time in life when every mor-



Jack Hodgins

tal begins to think of roads not taken, doors closing and the near impossibility of happy endings. "How will I go on if he/she predeceases me" is one of those intrusive thoughts. It seems as if the only end to a happy marriage is despair. Some go so far as to make suicide pacts.



Jack Hodgins: Essays on His Works
ed. by Annika Hannan
Guernica Editions, 2010
$20.00 Can, $18.00 US

For Axel Thorstad, the end game couple contract was not a possibility. His wife died suddenly and without warning. The angel of death had descended *in medias res,* uninvited into their golden years. Axel is one of those men who never fell out of love. His marital co-dependence had been complete and satisfactory. The rest has been limbo, an extended season of loneliness and isolation in the couple's summer cottage.

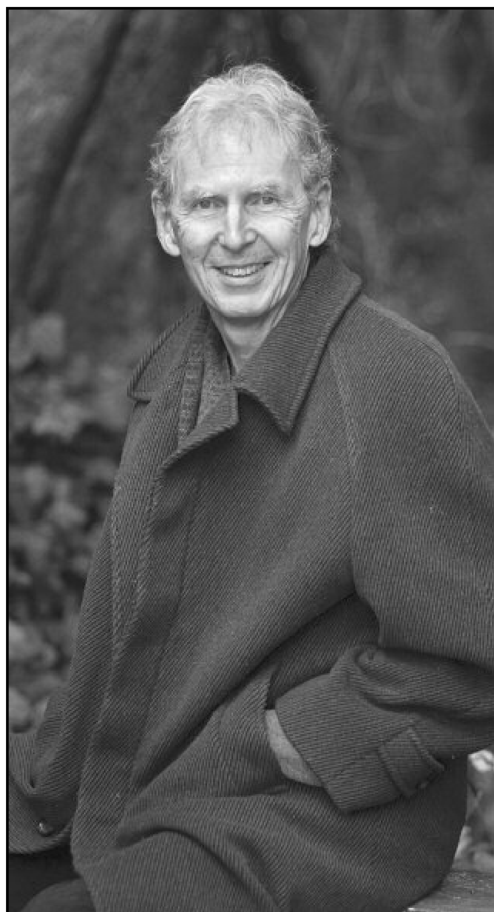
Frank McCourt once wrote that a successful life moves from fear to freedom, but he died relatively young, before he could record the final movement in the symphony of earthly existence. It is not hard to imagine fear taking over when married people are faced with the awful reality of bereavement.

The sky scraping component of Victoria's exemplary literary love couple has projected natural apprehension into his foundering widower. Whatever has informed Hodgins' creation of his geriatric protagonist character, uxorious with a top note of grief, Axel is fully realized as a man living out what has become a fugue, one tune that keeps looping back to the time before the retired school teacher and amateur cellist lost his pianist wife.

Axel, who has been folding his large shadow into a smaller and smaller drawer, advertises his services as a tutor in a bid to abandon his bereft paradise and have a last crack at freedom. The widower whose worst nightmare is "shiploads of senior-seniors sent out to sea and forbidden to return" busts out of the prison grief has made of his formerly idyllic life in Estevan Island, a pitch perfect portrait of island life in British Columbia.

All our islands are Brigadoon, where inbred populations disappear into forests with vertical longings. No one captures the comedic gap between man and tree as ably as Hodgins.

Even though Axel's aspirations are vertical, there are only horizontal moves in his board game of life. He carries his good intentions and a pocket Chaucer south to Hollywood, where "souning in moral vertu was his speech, and gladly would he learn and gladly teach" an aspiring actor who is required to finish high school by parents who wisely distrust an artistic vocation, possibly because they have been created by a writer who has a forest canopy view of that oxymoron "arts community."


Jack Hodgins

Axel, who has genetic history in Hollywood (his father a stuntman allegedly died jumping of a roof, his first stunt), is an absurdity among the lollypop people (actors with finite bodies and round photogenic heads). His gangly shape is as bad a fit in the ethically challenged gathering of movieland egos as are his values. Fortunately, salvation is foreshadowed in his charge's philanthropic work among the homeless. Travis, the boy actor, who began volunteering in order to understand his part in a series and remained committed to the down and out, proves to be redeemable in spite of his fascination with unreality.

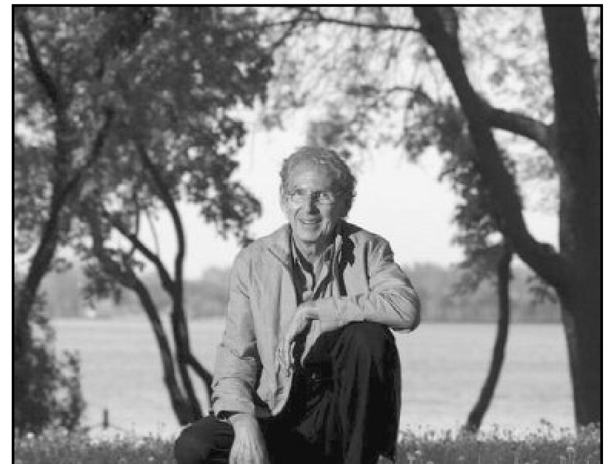
While Estevan is any Island on the BC Coast, Hollywood plays itself, Sodom West. Enter the actress Oonagh, a ghost from Axel's limited sexual history who arrives on the set in time to hear him articulate the realization that eventually comes to everyone who lives long enough to achieve loneliness, "…it always seemed important that there be those who were going before us – sometimes as teachers or coaches or self-appointed uncles, but mostly just *there*, running things, providing examples, and causing us to feel we're following in their footsteps."

"And now they've disappeared." Her voice was disappointed for him.

"Taking their footsteps with them." This seemed to have happened while he was hiding out on his island. "Of course I should have known but it has caught me by surprise," as it always does.

Hodgins is a master of sweet irony. If the human comedy dictates happy endings, we are rewarded by Axel's circuitous journey from innocence to experience that leaves us instructed in the meaning of life. For the aging protagonist, this means rediscovery and revelation, the realization that everything real and imagined is transitory. *Ars breva, vita breva.*

The reticence that his creator may have felt in projecting the gentle creature from his experience/imagination on to the page is integrated in the character of a careful man who reacts slowly, as in movie close-ups not on the bigger stage of life. Axel is no actor. He is real. Every step he takes is one slow frame in the leisurely film documentary of his journey. He has ventured off to find what he already knows.


Jack Hodgins

Back on his island after his Chaucerian pilgrimage to Hollywood, where there are no endings because no one gets old, he realizes he had happiness in his suitcase all along. Axel has led an authentic life and he can look back and see the good he has done. That should be the measure of every man.

Jack Hodgins is at the retrospective stage of his career. The word stage has been chosen because his genre is theatre. The books read like films seen at drive-in movies in the forest. Just like the old days of Punch and Judy and C*ommedia del arte*, the characters are familiar because they come from ordinary life.

Some critical commentators like to talk about Hodgins' "magic realism" and compare him to writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Marquez's writing is steeped in the memory of Catholicism with its promised miracles and sacramental mysteries, a kind of baroque counter/counter reformation. Hodgins' "magic" is not alchemy. It is more empirical than that. A tree is a tree and regarding it as anything else is the source of irony in Hodgins' stories, whose sensibility is closer to an Indigenous point of view than the European ethno-centrism which still pervades academic thinking.

If Hodgins stretches to the baroque possibility, it is a form of neo-mannerism as his characters yearn, and therein lurks the comic potential, for the verticality of trees. Of course they fail, just as the Revelations Colony of Truth failed, because ideal society is less a creation than a social organism that finds the balance between the vertical and the horizontal.

A more seamless iconography of the woods, one that migrated from Asia and evolved over thousands of years, already exists in the Rainforest. The European model is in conflict here and Hodgins' know this better than the commentators who create formulas for his non-formulaic writing.

Guernica Editions, whose Writer's Series is one of the finer moments of its founder Antonio D'Alfonso, has recently published *Jack Hodgins, Essays on His Works* with a stunning photo of Canlit's Wild Man of the Woods on the cover. These questions are considered within. One of the commendable features of the Writers Series is that each book has a different editor, bringing varied perspectives to the life and work of Canadian authors. In this case, the essays are mostly written by academics who reflect the current tilt back to formalism in the Canadian book industry. Their papers contribute to the diversity of opinion, but the author remains enigmatic.

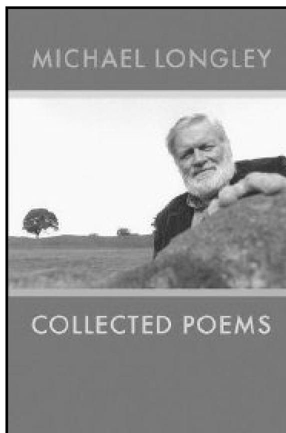
The most revealing part of the book is the interview with Tim Struthers in which Hodgins, like a magician who is bound by oath to protect his tricks, lets the interviewer answer most of his own questions about how he draws supernatural narratives out of a familiar landscape. Struthers' innocent caveat, "Possibly the most important lesson I have learned from writers…is how art resists, redefines, transcends the terms that critics apply in studying it," transforms his worldly speculation into non sequitur. Perhaps that is why the man on the cover is laughing.

Linda Rogers is Victoria's poet laureate. Her recent book* Muscle Memory *was voted Monday Magazine's poetry book of the year.

Surprise Within Continuous Form

Bert Almon

Michael Longley, Belfast-born, has evolved into one of the best contemporary poets, an eminence recognized by the Queen's Medal for Poetry, the Whitbread Prize, the Hawthornden Prize, and the T. S. Eliot Prize. He was appointed Ireland Professor of Poetry for 2007-2010, an especially appropriate honor. His *Collected Poems* show the three qualities that T. S. Eliot thought were the marks of a great poet: "abundance, variety, and complete competence." The 328 pages of the collection demonstrate abundance, but sheer volume is not enough. He has the other qualities as well.



Collected Poems
Michael Longley
Wake Forest University Press, 2009

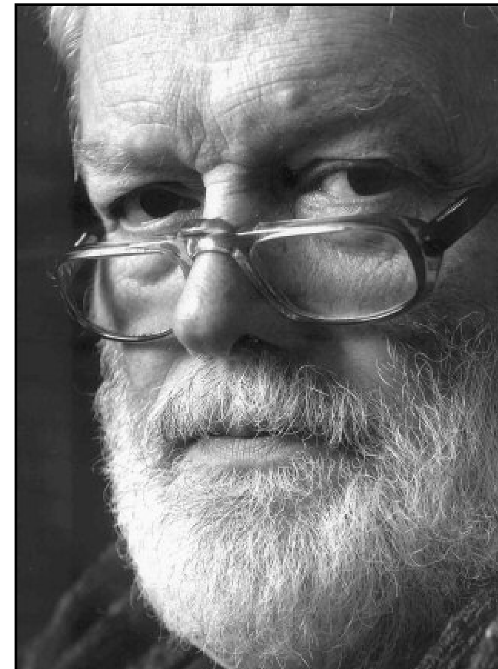
Longley himself has suggested that by the time he dies his work will look like four poems: "a very long love poem, a very long meditation on war and death, a very long nature poem, and a playful poem on the art of poetry." Certainly these elements in his work constitute sufficient variety: they are among the perennial subjects of poetry. He is particularly haunted by war and death, with impetus given by his father's experiences in two world wars and his own experience of The Troubles. His father fought in the 36th Ulster Division at the Battle of the Somme and was marked for life by the ordeal. Longley knows that Ulster's participation in the Great War had a bizarre political tinge that foreshadowed later conflicts: as he points out in one of his best known poems, "Wound," soldiers went over the top shouting "Fuck the Pope!" and the Unionist motto, "No Surrender!" The poem, anti-Catholic expletive and all, is a standard piece for the syllabus in English schools, and it is a far cry from the old favorite, Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier." Longley's numerous poems dealing with the Trojan War and the return of Odysseus from it have been a brilliant means of writing obliquely about war and civil war, though he has never been reluctant to write about the conflicts directly. His "Ceasefire," about the scene in *The Iliad* wherein King Priam goes to Achilles to beg for the body of Hector, resonates with the griefs of European wars and the family tragedies of Northern Irish conflicts. Longley writes love poems of deep tenderness. His two line masterpiece, "The Parting," manages to convey the poetry and pity of war, in Wilfred Owen's phrase, and its pathos is heightened because it is an exchange between husband and wife. The Ulster injection, "och," which conveys grief, gives the scene a local habitation and name:

> *He: "Leave it to the big boys, Andromache."*
> *'Hector, my darling husband, och, och,' she.*

So much is packed into these lines: male hubris and condescension, and female helplessness which can find an outlet only in keening. Longley is an outstanding writer of elegies, extending a tradition that goes to the origins of lyric poetry in the West. Unfortunately, Northern Ireland has given him numerous subjects for elegies.

Longley majored in Classics at Trinity College, Dublin and studied with the great scholar, W. B. Stanford, whose study of *The Odyssey* in Western literature is a classic. Longley claims to have been an indifferent student, but his poems inspired by Homer, Ovid, and Horace make up for any earlier neglect. He has an Horatian interest in writing about the art of poetry. In an interview, he singled out his couplet, "The Weather in Japan" as work about the art of poetry: "Makes bead curtains of the rain. / Of the mist a paper screen." Like Pound's "In a Station of the Metro," the poem illustrates the creative power of metaphor in two lines of great delicacy. Longley was a member of Philip Hobsbaum's famous creative writing circle in Belfast, The Group (as were Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon, James Simmons, Paul Muldoon, and Ciaran Carson). Longley's poem called "The Group," which skewers poetasters called by names like Telesilla, Ion, Charexinna, and Lamprocles, has the edge of Roman satire, and anyone who has taken part in a creative writing circle or workshop will recognize the types. Presumably, the targets are not his friends. Increasingly, Longley has written poems about nature, especially in his second home in Carrigskeewaun, County Mayo, that continue the ancient tradition of pastoral poetry and seem imbued with the hard-won serenity of the odes of Horace.

It is not enough to invoke the classical traditions or praise commitment to art. The poems must measure up. Longley has a dedication to craft that would please his classical models. He has experimented with syllabic verse and free forms, but most of his poetry is in traditional meters and rhymed with a skill rare even among so-called New Formalists. A reader looking through the *Collected Poems* might notice how frequently Longley uses lines without pauses. He achieves a variety of tonal and rhythmic effects in such lines, ranging from grim irony to a lyric poignancy. The last line of "Thaw" shows the lyricism: "The spring's a blackbird with one white feather." He frequently works without pauses at the ends of his characteristically long lines, end-stopping or enjambing them rather than drawing out the sense from line to line in the way that Milton advocated. These strategies contribute to his distinctive music. His dedication to lyric perfection is signaled by his love for a saying by Tennyson: "a perfect lyric inscribes the shape of an S." The letter S is symmetrical and regular, but has a sinuous swerve in it, a surprise within a continuous form. The choice of such a metaphor for poetry seems appropriate for Michael Longley. This review began with T. S. Eliot's characterization of the qualities of great poetry. They were quoted from Eliot's essay on Tennyson. It would be premature to call a living poet "great," but Longley's work, with its abundance, variety, and complete competence, has a rare distinction.



Michael Longley

Bert Almon teaches a poetry masterclass with Derek Walcott at the University of Alberta.

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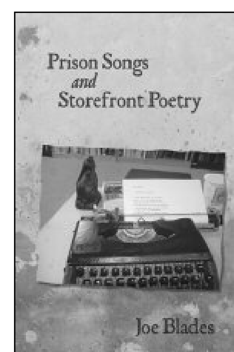

Prison Songs *and* Storefront Poetry

by **Joe Blades**

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Joe Blades lives in Fredericton, New Brunswick. He is the author of seven poetry books, including *Cover Makes a Set* (1990), *River Suite* (1998), *from the book that doesn't close* (2008) and the forthcoming *Casemate Poems (Collected).*

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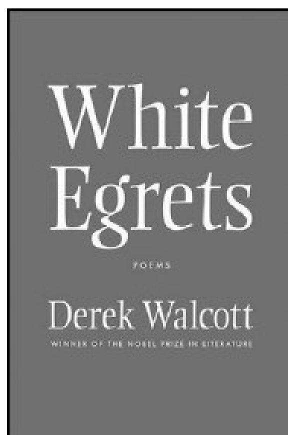
White Egrets

George Elliott Clarke



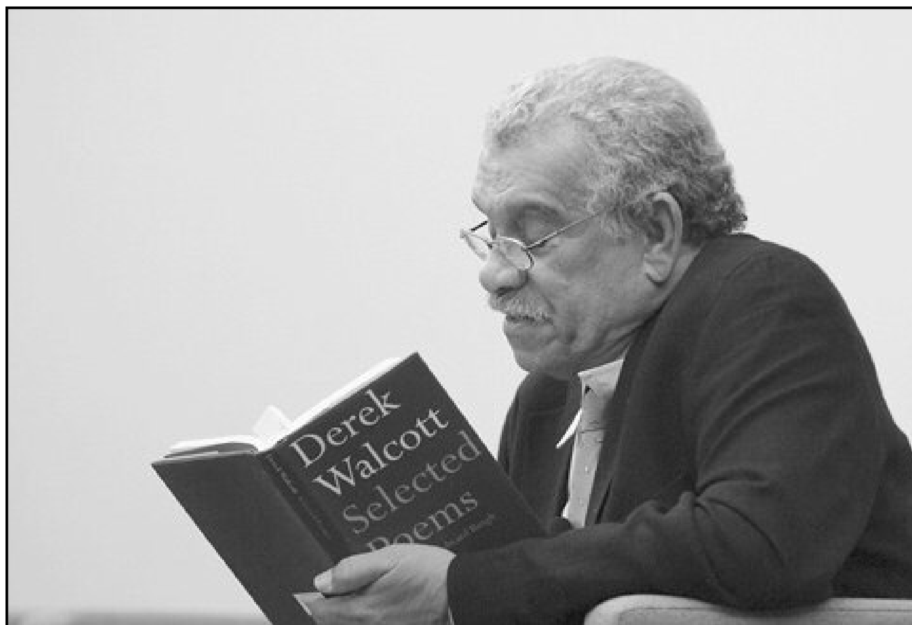
White Egrets
Derek Walcott
Farrar, Straus and
Giroux, $28.00

According to Internet sources, the egret—or heron—symbolizes balance, self-reliance, and tranquility in enduring vicissitudes and pains. Surely the 1990 Nobel Laureate in Literature Derek Walcott knows this symbolism. Indeed, in his new book's titular poem, he writes, "Accept it all with level sentences, / with sculpted settlement that sets each stanza": Observing the egrets, his persona anticipates "that peace / beyond desires and beyond regrets, / at which I may arrive eventually." Yes, now an octogenarian, the poet faces—let it be distantly still—the proof of his mortality. But he is aware of it, for others have given proof of theirs. Inescapably then, *White Egrets* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, $28), partakes of the twilight realm of elegy, the mix of nostalgia and sorrow that voids our world of argument and strife. In its fading away, those who matter most to the poet appear vividly—larger than life—colossal figures, in whose presence diurnal reality dwindles, making way for dream and memory. Thus, Walcott images the deaths of friends, or their revivification in recollection, as being kin to the visual behaviour of egrets and hills:

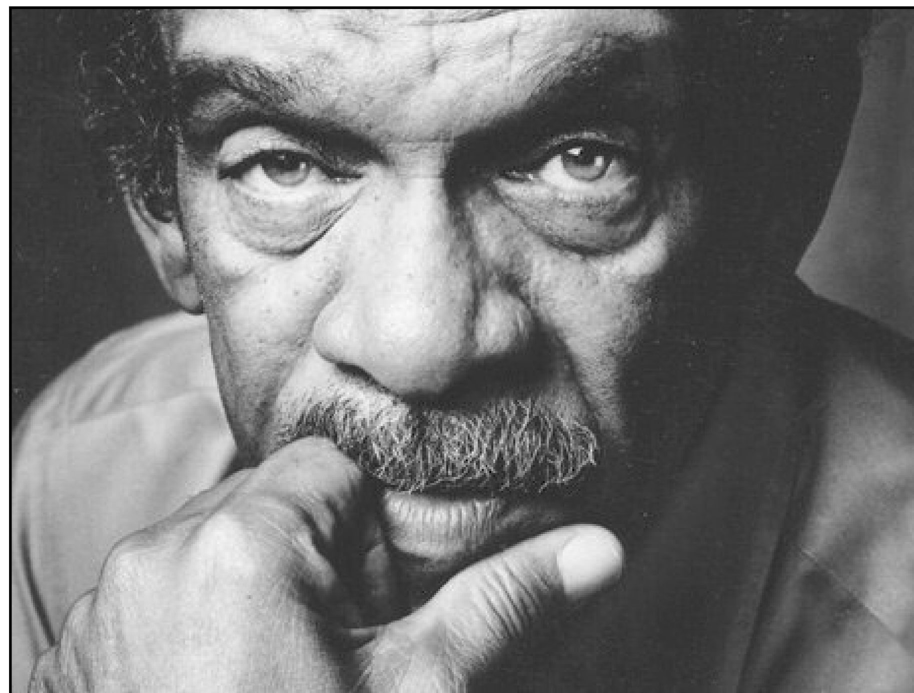
> *… Some friends, the few I have left,*
> *are dying, but the egrets stalk through the rain*
> *as if nothing mortal can affect them….*
> *Sometimes the hills themselves disappear*
> *like friends, slowly, but I am happier*
> *that they have come back now, like memory, like prayer.*

Tellingly, the very appearance of *White Egrets* is grey: the dust jacket, the grey-washed photo of the poet ("egret-haired *viejo*"), the print upon the page. We meet the *grisaille* of fog, of oblivion, of the vagaries of memory. Even history is only "immortal greyness." At the close of the book, "a cloud slowly covers the page and it goes / white again," but it is the grey-whiteness of shadow, "the dial of time." Clearly, Walcott views humanity—we busy, grasping fools—in the light of his own autumn, his private dusk, while remaining, as Poet—as deathless as the language.

The substance of this collection is the something-nothing of a shadow—that living spectre that dies with us. Walcott's persona declares he's an "old man in the dimming world." Indeed, if his persona in these newest, latest poems is anything like the man himself, Walcott is suffering from diabetes, watching his weight, and recalling those he liked and loved—family, lovers, friends, other writers and painters—those



Derek Walcott



Derek Walcott

who have passed away, but also "come back now, like memory, like prayer." After all, "they are seraphic souls, as Joseph [Brodsky] was."

Yet, and here's the—'body'—rub: The virile man still looks with lust upon "An average beauty, magnified to deific, demonic / stature by the fury of intellect, / a flat-faced girl with slanted eyes and a narrow / waist, and a country lilt to her voice." He complains, "you're too old to be / shaken by such a lissome young woman…"; he dubs himself a "grizzled satyr." But he also admires Roberta: "storm-haired, full-lipped, with axe-blade cheeks." His attitude here—the old man desiring, the old man lusting—is William Butler Yeats's too, and Walcott knows it. He should not go gently into Dylan Thomas's 'good night,' not while he has breath and desire (and, for him, the physical noun is indivisible from the abstraction). Yeats had his Steinach monkey-gland operation to recharge his 'heat,' but Walcott has—or only admits to having—his heart, his eyes, his will/desire. (In any event, 'Jacko'Keats was wrong: *Woman* is truth, *Woman* is beauty, and that is all we need to know.)

In old-school, African-American parlance, to be 'grey' is to be mixed-race, part-black, part-white, and that is Walcott's being, or division, and a central inspiration in his oeuvre. Now he is 'grey' in age as he is in 'race,' and so has the wisdom to insist, "light simplifies us whatever our race or gifts." Aging also has a whitening effect, as he suggests in "20." Still, Walcott elegizes, especially, black writers and painters he has adored all these decades. The African-American playwright August Wilson, the African-Canadian-Jamaican novelist John Hearne, the Martiniquan poet Aimé Césaire, all receive their tribute poems. Yet, sweet it is to read, in one line, the names of those pioneering African-American painters—"Horace Pippin, Romare [Bearden], Jacob Lawrence…." How gracious to grant them their due! But Walcott understands he must also speak to our time, and so there is a poem for US President Barack Obama: "Forty Acres" should have been Obama's Inauguration poem. It refers back to the emancipation promise—never kept—that ex-slaves would receive 'forty acres and a mule.' But it telescopes forward to suggest that the broken promise has instead become an "impossible prophecy" fulfilled, that crowds part "for their president," just as soil parts for a plough—or "the lined page" parts for a pen. Another poem, "44," endorses Obama: After a haircut in an African-American barbershop, Walcott announces, "I feel changed, like an election promise that is kept."

The single 'raced' personage who seems to attract Walcott's undiluted scorn, though he goes unnamed, is his compatriot, Caribbean-born, Nobel Laureate in Literature V.S. Naipaul (dubbed "Nightfall" in a mid-career, Walcott poem). Although, in "46," Joseph Conrad—no ally of the Third World—is referenced (for his sense of "the emptiness" of jungle and bush and even "our pathetic, pompous cities"), it was Naipaul who wrote in 1962 that the West Indies had created "nothing." It is difficult not to see him, then, as the butt of Walcott's irate oration: "all the endeavours /

of our lives are damned to nothing by the tiring / catalogue of a vicious talent that severs / itself from every attachment, a bitterness whose / poison is praised for its virulence."

The collection's loosened, elegiac sonnets, bound neither by pentameter nor the fetish for fourteen lines, do make use of rhyme, a flexible *ababcdcdefgefg*, plus uncountable variations that refute the scheme just set down. Walcott's rhymes are often subtle, or only (deliberately) partially realized, to maintain a conversational ease, the sort of smooth, American utterance that Wallace Stevens exemplifies. Yet, given Walcott's flawless ear, his precision in hearing the sound and sense of words, it is impossible not to read *White Egrets* as 'Light Regrets.'

Certainly, the poet has a few. The persona admits, "I treated all of them badly, my three wives." There's also a "beloved" wounded by his "caustic jealousy." He recalls and alters a line from King Lear: "smell your hands, they reek of imagined crimes." In third-person, he recognizes "how often he had failed / with women." The "old phrase '*Peccavi. I have Sind,*'" comes to his mind. There is even sorrow for "the torn poems [that] sail from you like a flock / of white egrets in a long last sigh of release." Nicely, Walcott declares, "egrets / … are the bleached regrets / of an old man's memoirs…."

White Egrets is Derek Walcott's 16th collection of poetry, excluding his dozen-plus plays (which are, in truth, verse dramas), but including that singular epic, *Omeros* (1990). It is quietly masterful, though lacking the verbal pyrotechnics of *The Bounty* (1997) and *Tiepolo's Hound* (2000). Nevertheless, though Walcott himself wonders "If it is true / that my gift has withered," his lines unfurl silkily, shimmeringly classical, as in this elegy for a friend: "the full grief will hit me and my heart will toss / like a horse's head…. / Love lies underneath it all though, the more surprising / the death, the deeper the love, the tougher the life…. / Your death is like our friendship beginning over." His verse seems as plain as water, then as romantic as wine, and, next, as sassy as acid. Dramatically excellent, too, is the imagery (as customary): "Watch how spray will burst / like a cat scrambling up the side of wall, / gripping, sliding, surrendering; how, at first, / its claws hook then slip with a quickening fall / to the lace-rocked foam." The sustained achievement of that metaphor is astonishing, as is this reflection: "That is the heart, coming home, / trying to fasten on everything it moved from / how salted things only increase its thirst." Naturally, too, echoes abound of other voices, such as those of Shakespeare, Conrad, the once-supreme British canon established so effectively by the once-supremacy of British cannon.

Walcott cannot be Walcott without musing on empire and its language/literature and its *déjà vu* loss. The twilight of the man's life sees him recalling that schoolbook empire, now long-gone, upon which the sun was said to never set. He corrects the record: It is the sun itself that "never sets." Still, these lyrics remind us that Walcott has always been a poet of travel: Maybe it comes from his being raised in the shadow of an empire that declared England the Mother Country that all 'subjects' should yearn to see; or maybe it comes from growing up on an island: from there, wherever you look, there's an exotic somewhere elsewhere. Thus, in *White Egrets*, the poet writes from the vantage point of Santa Cruz, California (near Monterey), apparently; but also definitely from Sicily, Spain, Italy, London, New York City, Capri, Amsterdam, Barcelona, as well as, in one poem, Switzerland, and, in others, likely his native St. Lucia. This traveller with an eye for landscapes, letters, and ladies—examines them and memories (the scripture that defines us), both amusing and haunting.

Walcott is already a Poet among the Poets and Poetry. He thus properly alludes to Yeats, another indisputably great poet, and poignant and yearning also in his grey, white, twilight age. But the shadow of another poet—indisputably disputable, another poet who perhaps wrote his best when he was most deservedly broken, and who lived to write still into old age; his shade also touches these pages, here and there: Ezra Pound, the imprisoned 'traitor' of 'The Pisan Cantos' (1945), scrutinizing ants in his 'Gitmo'-style cell, speaking with resignation and humility, writing his renunciations and his regrets. When Walcott notices "Like this ant [is] this hand," or eyes "a beetle on its back," or deems his mind "an ageing sea remembering its lines," or views sparrows that "line antennae like staves," it is easy to conjure up impounded Pound, bookless, recalling favourite works, jotting down the quotations, or taking the nature and speech around him for his ready subjects. Walcott's "21: A Sea- Change," in its particular repetition, echoes, not "Ariel's Song," but Pound's "What thou lovest well" from Canto LXXXI.

The special witness of *White Egrets*—as is true also of 'The Pisan Cantos'—is that poetry is at its most profound when it seems so simple. It is the gospel that solemn immortals leave to cleric and laity alike, one that exacts a life of sacrifice.

George Elliott Clarke's **Blues and Bliss: The Poetry of George Elliott Clarke** *(2008), edited by Jon Paul Fiorentino, received the 2009 Eric Hoffer Book Award for Poetry. His latest work is* **The Gospel of X,** *a chapbook issued by the Montreal-based Vallum Society for Arts & Letters Education (info@vallummag.com).*

Ronsdale's Autumn Picks

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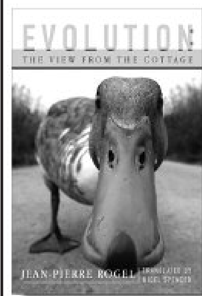

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translated by Nigel Spencer

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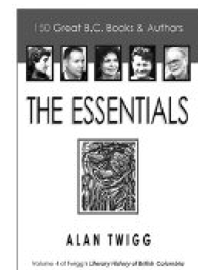

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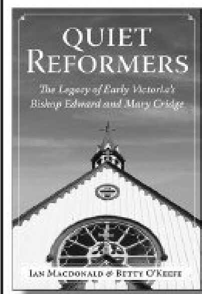

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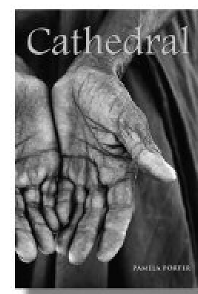

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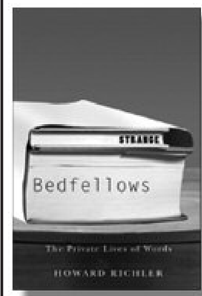

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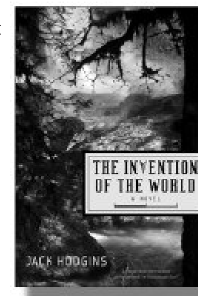

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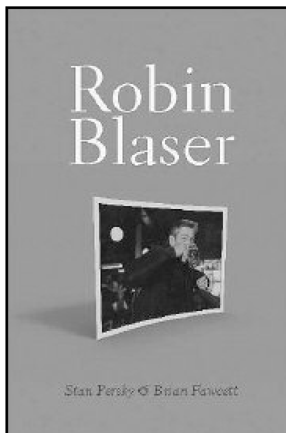
Robin Blaser Remembered

Heidi Greco

Invited out for dinner the other night, I was reminded of just how small a world Vancouver can be. Even though we were gathered on a farm, far from any pretense of city, the surprise of friends in common occurred, amazing all of us: the way Surreyites know folks from Kitsilano and how it takes someone from Langley to make the connection.

In the small world that is Vancouver, poet Robin Blaser cast a mighty big shadow. Towering down from Burnaby Mountain's Simon Fraser University, the spot where he landed a job in 1966, his influence spread well beyond the walls of the classrooms where he taught.



Robin Blaser
Stan Persky and Brian Fawcett
New Star Books, 2010
128 p. $16.00

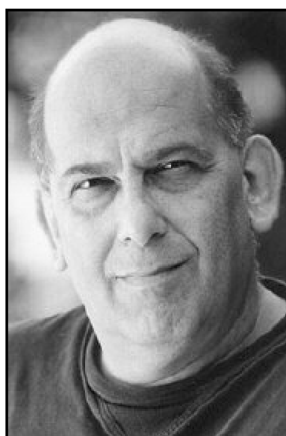
New Star Books has produced a thin little book that contains a very readable pair of extended essays by two respected writers, Stan Persky and Brian Fawcett. Both men knew Blaser well. Fawcett was one of his students; Persky's relationship ran deeper as, for a while, he lived with him. But both reveal a deep understanding of Blaser – of the man and of his work.

Although the book opens with Persky's essay, those not familiar with Blaser and his work might find it helpful to read Fawcett's section first. It provides not only a more personable and inclusive-feeling approach, it offers much more context for Blaser and his work. Fawcett recalls being an impressionable 22 year old and meeting Blaser, one of the professors he met upon first signing on as a student at the then almost-brand-new SFU. As he puts it,

> *I thought live writers were going to be like Theseus and Heracles from Greek mythology: half human, half divine, or if not godlike, at least far beyond the human and mortal stuff I was made of.*

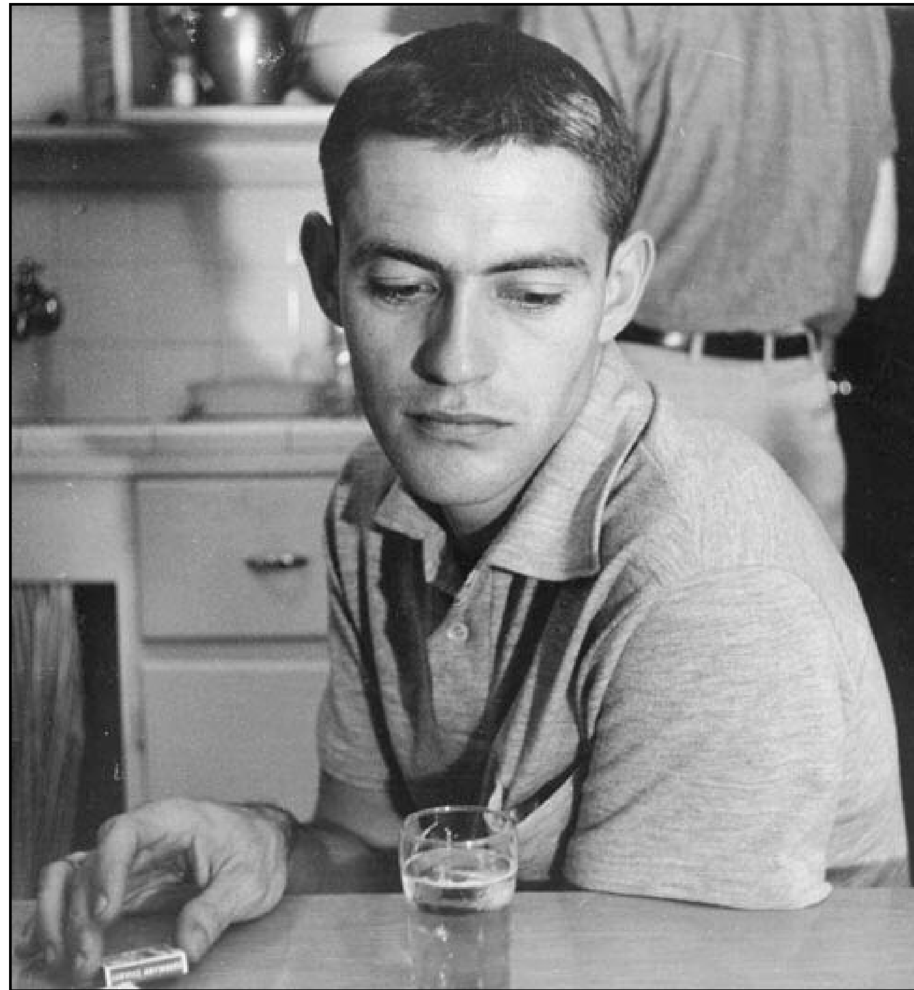
Blaser didn't disappoint. He was just turned forty, handsome and sophisticated enough to be called, not entirely tongue-in-cheek, the Marlon Brando of American Poetry.

Although Fawcett manages to de-deify Blaser over the course of their friendship, he clearly maintains a deep respect for him. But more helpful to the reader than tracking their friendship is Fawcett's exposition of The New American Poetry, the movement based on the 1960's hugely influential anthology, *New American Poetry*, of which Blaser was a part (along with Jack Spicer, Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley, Charles Olson and others). He provides a condensed overview of the principles held by members of that group, and gives a better explanation than I've ever read on Olson's "Projective Verse." Speaking of Olson's early poems, he says, "His utterly declarative mind packs every iota of intelligence he has into each instant, and lets the narrative and the conventions of the referential universe fend for themselves. Thus the poems move with sometimes disorienting velocity from philosophical deposit to psychological registrations to facts and speculations about local history and geography to what he could see out the kitchen window to cosmological musings, the different modes often lurching over or colliding with one another…". If only Fawcett could have been one of my professors when I was pursuing an English degree!


Stan Persky

Brian Fawcett

Persky's essay, called "Reading Robin Blaser" is exactly that. It is an extended analysis of Robin Blaser's poetry. As with Fawcett's contribution to the book, Persky's is readable and insightful. Interwoven into his explications of Blaser's work are his own observations of what poetry is. I particularly like the clarity contained in his remarks about Blaser's *Moth Poem*, all of which are amplified by a re-telling of the occurrence which set off this particular series of poems – "…an eerie sound emanating from the baby grand piano, as if the instrument itself was playing." It turned out that a moth had got under the lid and every time it rustled against the strings, a thrumming sound resulted.


Robin Blaser at Berkeley in California

Persky writes this enlightening passage:

> *One of the differences between poetry and prose is that the lines of poetry function as "doubles," bearing the meaning contained in the line – the moth in the piano "will play on," that is, will continue to play, whether one reads the moth as simply a literal creature or a representation of the poet – as well as the meanings extended by succeeding lines – the moth in the piano "will play on / frightened wings." And "frightened wings brush / the wired interior / of that machine." This fleeting reminder of why poems have linebreaks is the most fundamental element of the art, yet it's a point seldom made in schools, leaving students puzzled about how the poem tells multiple stories.*

Like a poem, this book tells multiple stories, more than the obvious two presented by the two authors. The charm of Persky's essay is his intimacy with the actual work. The balance offered by Fawcett's more explanatory stance makes for a satisfying read. The 16 pages of photos inserted between the two essays further serve to bring the poet to life.

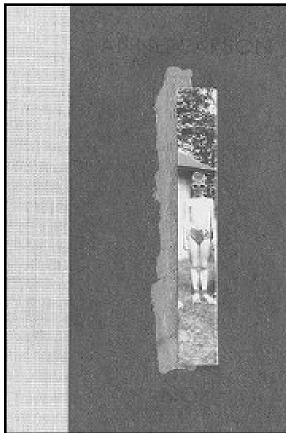
Near the end of the his section, Persky offers this poignant thought, "…we won't be allowed to forget Robin Blaser." This volume further ensures the truth of that.

Heidi Greco lives in South Surrey, where she works as a writer and editor. Her novella,* Shrinking Violets, *will be published by Quattro Books next spring.

Anne Carson's Nox, Multa Nox

James Edward Reid

"*Multa nox:* late in the night, perhaps too late."
Nox, Section 1.0



Nox
Anne Carson
New Directions Books
Accordion-folded paper, $37.50

In an earlier work, *Economy of the Unlost*, Anne Carson examined the nature of the economies in the work of Simonides of Ceos and Paul Celan. Celan was preoccupied by the mass murders he was fortunate to have escaped. They haunted his life and the intense compression of his poetry. Simonides (556-467 BC) was the first Western writer to be paid for his compositions, for writing epitaphs for the shades in Hades. His lines honouring the Spartan dead who were defeated at Thermopylae are better known than his name:

> *Go tell the Spartans, you who are passing by,*
> *That obedient to their laws, here we lie.*

He was hired by those who hoped that his epitaphs would somehow preserve something of the history of the unlost from eternal night—if only with a name and a few lines *in memoriam*. In a 2004 *Paris Review* (171) interview, Carson spoke of her brother Michael's death, and her "need to gather up the shards of his story and make it into something containable. So this book is a lament in the sense of an attempt to contain a person after he is no longer reachable." In *Nox*, Carson continues to deal with the death of her estranged brother, and gathers these shards into a box that tries to make sense of his years of absence, her absence from him, and his final absence.

The front cover of this stone gray box that holds many containable things, bears the words, 'Anne Carson' and 'Nox' in gray type. They disappear when the box is tilted or regarded in certain types of light, suggesting the uncertainties and shifting responses inside. The coda on the back of the box indicates, "When my brother died I made an epitaph for him in the form of a book. This is a replica of it, as close as we could get." When *Nox* is opened or closed, a faint rushing of air is just audible, much like that of the door of a vault. But no vault, grave or stone marks her brother's passing. *Nox* must.

The left hand pages provide definitions for each Latin word in Catullus' Ode 101, in which he quietly describes his responses and actions after the loss of his brother. Catullus' references in Ode 101 and 68 are the only ones we have to his brother. Many of the defined words present usage examples that contain different forms of the word *nox*. The right hand pages reproduce old family photographs, drawings, postage stamps, and scraps of correspondence from her brother. Reproductions so fine that I initially found myself reaching to smooth a crumpled edge or touch a staple's shadow, each of which was only there as an image. Carson's complete translation of Catullus' poem appears in a yellowed reproduction near the beginning of Section 7.2. The rhythm of some of the lines are chopped and broken by pauses familiar from difficult funeral eulogies. Her translation appears again on the last page of *Nox*, this time obviously crumpled and then flattened. All of its words are smudged by tears, or by their *simulacrimae*. Her translation carries Catullus into English while retaining as much of the ease and balance with which he presents his sorrow, confusion, loss, and tenderness.. Her take on her own version is different: "No one (even in Latin) can approximate Catullan diction . . . I came to think of translating as a room, not exactly an unknown room, where one gropes for a light switch" (7.1).

The Nox box open

Anne Carson

The right hand pages also carry an occasionally fragmentary, and sometimes continuing narrative of what she recalls of her brother as a child, her mother's recollections, and Carson's own attempts to make sense of his estrangement. None of this is as *trompe l'oeil* or random as it may appear at first glance. Unless she decides to unravel them, the different threads are woven together. Take the example of the pages that open Section 3.2. The first page describes Carson's visit to Copenhagen to visit Michael's widow who gives her photographs Michael took in different countries "of the girl who died" who was "the love of his life." An empty page follows. The next page prints a thin vertical slice torn from a photo that reveals the corner of a modest house (possibly one of the many childhood homes of Carson and her brother), next to which stands an empty wooden chair. The next page provides definitions and usages of *miseras.* Part of this entry reads: "*miserrima Dido*; most sad Dido; (in speical [stet] use) . . . wretched in health, sick, suffering . . . *nocte fratris quam ipso fratre miserior*: made sadder by the brother's night than the brother himself." The page facing *miseras* reproduces a small rectangle of paper that appears to have been folded along its four edges before it was torn from a larger piece of paper. It carries only these words, addressed directly to her brother, "*Places in the world where you and I saw things*" in italics. The change in the fonts and their forms throughout *Nox* provide a number of associated through-lines.

As if trying to reach back to her childhood with Michael, some of the pages resemble a child's scrapbook. While over every page of *Nox*, the shade of *nox*, *noctis* and *nocte* tolls repeatedly like a distant bell. Yet there is much light in the shadows of this book, and in the smudged perceptions of the twilight that marks Carson's elegy, lament, reflection, and history in *Nox*. Celan also believed that "He speaks truly who speaks the shade," in an attempt to understand history and keep it from slipping away. Anne Carson states that history "forms a lock against oblivion" (3.3). Some readers may agree. But there is no lock against oblivion. Even in *Nox*.

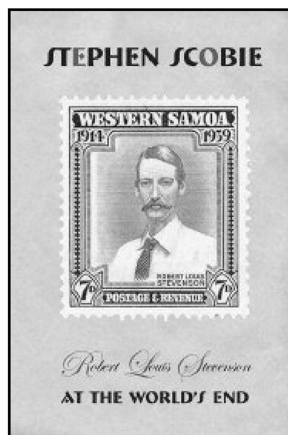
Looking back is endemic in Carson's work: to Isaiah in *Glass, Irony and* God, Geryon in *Autobiography of Red,* Virginia Woolf and Thucydides in *Men in the Off Hours*, and who creep in *The Beauty of the Husband*, and Sappho in *If Not, Winter*. Throughout this elegiac and hopeful book, the measured description of her responses and actions after her brother's death are as clear and resonant as those of Catullus. With a similar commitment to memory, and a related hope, Joseph Brodsky often said that he didn't write for those who came after him, "but to please the shades of his poetic forbears." *Nox* is one of the books I may turn to, the next time I lose someone, for its commitment to making sense of past and present difficulties, and preserving responses to them.

***James Edward Reid is a Canadian writer whose family moved every two or three years. Seven years of Latin study during that time provided a kind of continuity. His work has appeared recently in* Vallum: Contemporary Poetry, The Sarmatian Review *and* Off The Shelf.**

Alias Stephen Scobie

Jamie Dopp

Over the past forty years Stephen Scobie has been one of the most prolific and original poets in Canada. In some twenty collections he has published everything from short personal lyrics to book length narratives, in styles ranging from what bp Nichol called "trad" to those shaped by various contemporary experimental movements. Along the way he has also produced a half dozen important critical studies, including landmark books on Leonard Cohen, bp Nichol and Bob Dylan.



RLS: At the World's End
Stephen Scobie
Ekstasis Editions, 2009
$19.95

Though Scobie has received a number of awards (two GG nominations for poetry, with *McAlmon's Chinese Opera* winning in 1980, the Gabrielle Rox prize, election to the Royal Society of Canada) his work has not attracted a great deal of critical attention. His poetry is rarely anthologized. Some of this can be explained by historical accident and the usual vagaries of literary politics, but another reason probably has to do with the diversity of Scobie's work itself. Because of the range of his texts it is hard to pick a few poems that can adequately stand in for "Stephen Scobie."

If there is an area of poetry in which Scobie has most distinguished himself, it is, not surprisingly, in his use of the documentary form. To date Scobie has produced five book length documentary poems. These include the above mentioned *McAlmon's Chinese Opera*, as well as books based on the stories of Bob Dylan (*And Don't Forget My Name*) and Jesus Christ (*Gospel*—the only book of Canadian poems ever written in the first person omniscient!). What all documentary poems have in common is a complex play between the imagined voice of the historical subject and the voice of the writer. Documentary poems deal in masks and irony. As Scobie himself puts it in his article "Documentary: The Forged Signature":

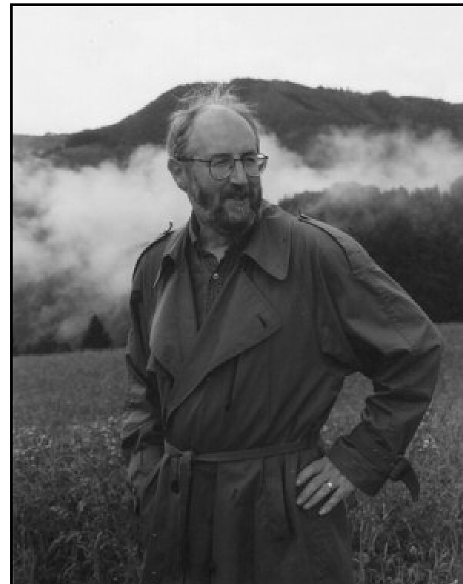
> *The relationship of poet to persona* [in documentary poems] *is one of dramatic irony, and this irony is the form assumed by the "dialectic between the objective facts and the subjective feelings of the poet," which continues to be, as Livesay perceived* [in her classic 1969 article on the subject], *the central characteristic of the genre.* (121)

With his most recent book, *Robert Louis Stevenson: At the World's End*, Scobie returns to the terrain of the documentary, this time taking as his subject the well-known Scottish novelist, poet, essayist and travel writer.

Stevenson is a fascinating character. He was the son of Robert Stevenson, the famous 19th Century engineer and railway designer, and Margaret Balfour, whose family was well-connected in the Scottish gentry. In keeping with their positions in Scottish society, the Stevensons were devout Presbyterians. Young Stevenson had a harshly Calvinist nursemaid ("Crummy") whose visions of damnation regularly tormented him in dreams. Overall, Stevenson was a somewhat strange-looking child, often sickly with lung infections, who learned how to read late but who spent much of his childhood compulsively writing stories. Before he grew into the man who was to become famous for such novels as *Treasurer Island, Kidnapped,* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, he had already made a name for himself as a travel writer, driven to travel, as he was, partly out of a desire to escape the confines of home and partly in search of a cure for his health.

Many of these elements find their way into *At the World's End*. The collection focuses on Stevenson's last days in the South Pacific. Poems move back and forth from the "present" of Stevenson in Samoa to earlier events from his life as he recalls them. There are a number of very fine poems evoking the tropical island landscape and the sense of being at the end of things, and these create a frame for the remembered events, the sense of someone near the end trying to understand the overall shape of his life.

As usual in a documentary poem much depends upon the play between historical subject and the voice of the writer. A number of important parallels jump out. The first has to do with Stevenson's Scottish heritage. Scotland plays a recurring role in Scobie's poetry as the perpetually absent / present place of origin, the home that is impossible to return to not just because of the passage of time but because, in a doubling of physical and existential qualities, it is a place of lack (this is perhaps most famously explored in "Dunino," the long poem in the collection of the same name, in which the metonym for Scotland becomes the name of a town that exists only as a leftover road sign with its strange echo of Rilke's famous elegies). Stevenson's life and work are rich in the complexities of dealing with Scottish heritage, and a number of poems in *At the World's End* explore this richness.



Stephen Scobie

Another parallel has to do with the relationship between writing and self. Many documentary poems take as their subjects other writers or artist figures, which reinforces the subject as an objective correlative for the writer of the documentary text. Stevenson's life and works powerfully evoke the complexities of trying to write oneself into identity (as you would expect from a writer whose most famous work is iconic for the split self). To write the self is to encounter the paradox that the "I" in language is always an alibi or alias for a self that is elsewhere (words are always, on some level, stand-ins for the absent thing-in-itself). Poems in *At the World's End* like the early one in which Stevenson meditates on his name highlight these complexities: "it's a fine name, a rich // succession of syllables / but I grew into it slowly, uncertainly." Stevenson eventually chooses to go by "Louis" even though his given name is "Lewis" and even though he sticks (rather contradictorily) to the English rather than the French pronunciation. This poem, like others in the collection, also contains allusions to Bob Dylan—an identity-shifter Scobie has shown persistent fascination with. The allusions to Dylan add a further level of irony and playful humour to the meditation.

The most profound parallel, however, has to do with how the poems in this book evoke that state of being in one's "last days." There are some very fine meditations about what it means to be close to death—at the end of this uncertain world and on the verge of an even more uncertain one. Take these lines from near the end:

> *May the night's warm night*
> *bend over me*
>
> *with the comfort of a long*
> *forgotten song . . . .*
>
> *God,*
> *I wish it was so easy!*
>
> *I, who like a child*
> *(do you hear me, Crummy?)*
>
> *have lain awake*
> *at 2 and 3 and 4 a.m.*
>
> *waiting for the hint of light*
> *that will calm my breath*
>
> *and let me sleep.*

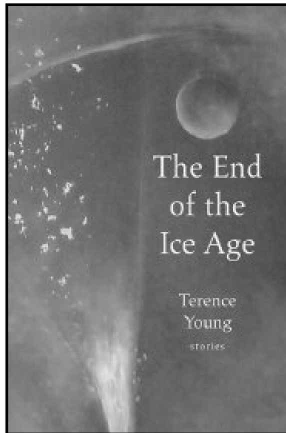
This book should resonate strongly with anyone who has lain awake under similar circumstance.

Jamie Dopp is the author of three books and recently edited* Now is the Winter: Thinking about Hockey *(Wolsak & Wynn) with Richard Harrison.

Terse Stories of Middle-Aged Angst

Eric Spalding

The End of the Ice Age is a collection of twelve stories by Victoria-based author Terence Young. The book jacket suggests that these stories will bring to mind the works of Raymond Carver and Denis Johnson. My own point of reference would be Richard Ford. As with this latter author, Young focuses on introspective middle-class men trying, not always successfully, to deal with their homes, the women in their lives, the passage of time and related matters.



The End of the Ice Age
Terence Young
Biblioasis, 2010,
165 pages

The stories are diverse. Some of them are told in the first person, others in the third; some are set in the present, others in the recent past. The locations vary from Canada and the United States to Mexico and Ireland. Also, although most of the stories do adopt the perspective of middle-aged men, some focus on younger men and, in "That Time of Year", on a woman. What remains constant among all of the characters is a sense of being out of place. Often, the narrator feels disconnected from the people around him or nostalgic for happier times.

An example of this nostalgia is my favourite story in the book, "Mole." In this story, the protagonist is in the library when he spots an ex-girlfriend from twenty years before poring over CDs. Young is effective at conveying the deliberations people go through in such situations: "Did she see *me*? Should I approach her? How will she react if she does?" The narrator eventually does talk to the woman and the exchange that they have is typical of many conversations in the book. The characters say few words, but what they say is often not what they intended to say, and they end up misunderstanding each other and misinterpreting each other's intentions. At the end of many of the stories, the main character winds up alone with his thoughts.

In most of the stories, Young successfully captures a memorable thought, a dramatic moment or a change in someone's life. "The Big Money", for instance, focuses on a twenty-year-old man's encounter on a Greyhound bus with a stranger who gives him advice that completely changes his career plans. This story resonated with me, because like many people I've had casual encounters with strangers who left a durable impression on me. I also liked the ingenuity of another story, "The Garden of the Fugitives", in which Young describes a car accident as a sequence of events that makes sense as it happens but that baffles the police officers who show up after the accident is over: how did those beer bottles wind up in the ditch, what is a gun doing on the road, and why were the two victims of the accident together in the first place?

Terence Young

Each story gives the appearance of being carefully thought out. For many stories, I had the impression that Young had initially written a much longer work only to cut it down to some essential core. In this respect, I often sensed that there was more to the characters than what appeared on the page. At other times, however, as in "Dream Vacation" or "The End of the Ice Age", I felt l was reading excerpts from longer works. In these instances, I thought that Young could have expanded the stories, because they ended just as I was just getting to know the protagonists.

Like the stories themselves, the style throughout the book is very pared-down and direct. There are no florid figures of speech here. The opening lines of "Mole" for instance have a laconic, film-noir resonance to them:

> *The usual library crowd: a few welfare mothers; this young couple with their first kid; a history buff with his cane and his Nazi belt buckle. I was no better than any of them. I'd scammed a research grant from the city, a story I'd fed the Archives Development Committee about the opium trade, links to early families, pioneer wives in particular. Sexy stuff. I talked about spinoffs, tours of Chinatown. Interactive stations. That was the word I used: stations. Even some poems set in concrete. Poems! Six months rent plus expenses, a year if they liked it. Ended up I never wrote a word, at least none they could use* (p. 129).

Young's writing is in keeping with the type of works that his editor, John Metcalf, seems to favour. I recall reading in Metcalf's *An Aesthetic Underground: A Literary Memoir* how much he likes the type of sparse, to-the-point realistic fiction that *The End of the Ice Age* exemplifies. Indeed, what I've read of Norman Levine, a favourite author of Metcalf's, seems similar to what Young has done in his book. Sometimes however I felt that the writing was too concise and controlled, the characters too silent. Occasionally, I wanted the author to provide more details in setting up his scenes. I also wanted the characters to be more loquacious – to speak as if they had not weighed their every word, as if they were not offering up their every sentence for careful analysis by the person whom they were speaking to.

In these terse stories, Young puts middle-class men in dramatic situations that will resonate with the many readers who have had to deal with similar issues in their lives.

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

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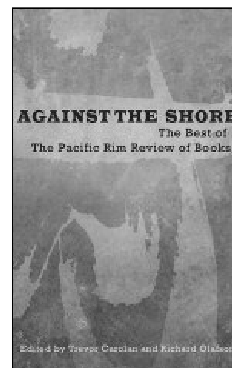

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From its inception in 2005, *The Pacific Rim Review of Books* has cast a close, constructive eye on contemporary literature. With this anthology, the *PRRB* now confirms its place in contemporary Canadian arts & letters. Addressing a broad horizon of topics and issues in engaged East-West culture, serious poetry, international relations, history, and ecological inquiry, contributors include such distinguished writers as Gary Snyder, Josef Skvorecky, Red Pine, Rex Weyler, Andrew Schelling, and Michael Platzer, as well as many of the veteran and talented young West Coast writers whose work *The Pacific Rim Review of Books* has consistently championed.

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

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

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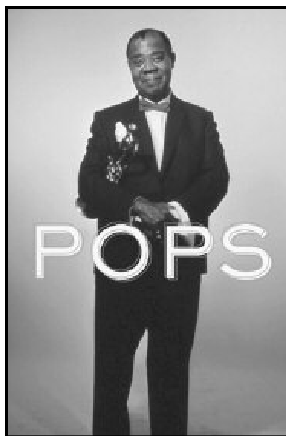
Jazz... The Heart and Soul of It

Joseph Blake

Here is a pair of brilliant biographies about two of the twentieth century's greatest jazz artists. Both books are thoroughly researched, adding much new information and insight into the lives of very complex men and their chosen art form. Both authors are musicians too, with lifelong passion for jazz and love for their singular, mythic subjects. These are two, truly magnificent books.



Pops
Terry Teachout
Houghton, Mifflin, Harcourt
475 p. cloth. $30

Terry Teachout's new biography of Louis Armstrong is a nuanced narrative of a life spanning jazz music's first century, an often-told story enriched by a treasure trove of new source material including material from Armstrong' personal collection of 650 reel-to-reel tape conversational revelations. Armstrong's collage art and autobiographical writing is equally insightful, and Teachout uses the musician's down-home philosophical waxing to further flesh-out a portrait of a proud but humble, powerful but wary, effervescent but private contradictory man behind the big grin and beautiful music.

A professional jazz musician before his tenure as drama critic for the *Wall Street Journal* and the author of several books including biographies of George Balanchine and H.L. Mencken, Teachout brings musical hipness and erudition to this loving portrait of Pops and his music. Racism, mob-influenced music business, and the artist's navigation of these evils are at the heart of Teachout's narrative. The author also eloquently describes the elements of Armstrong's jazz invention and makes a case for both the musician's groundbreaking work in the early 1920s, but also his singular achievement as a big band soloist, jazz vocalist and movie star right up to his transcendent version of *Hello Dolly!* in the mid-1960s.

Teachout repeats Miles Davis' appreciation of Louis Armstrong, saying "You can't play nothing on trumpet that doesn't come from him."

Louis Armstrong

Born in abject poverty in New Orleans in 1901, Armstrong died 70 years later as one of the most loved and best known men in the world. In Teachout's reading of Armstrong's epic life, a kaleidoscopic cast of wives, musicians, kings, politicians, gangsters and popes share profound years or illuminated moments with Pops.

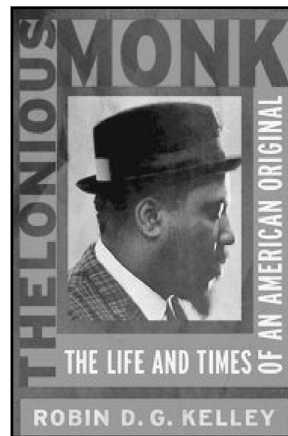
Sweet talking a lover, calling out President Eisenhower, and teasing royalty, the Armstrong portrayed in *Pops* is a giant.

Teachout writes that Armstrong "faced with the terrible realities of the time and place into which he had been born, he did not repine, but returned love for hatred and sought salvation in work. Therein lay the ultimate meaning of his epic journey from squalor to immortality: His sunlit, hopeful art, brought into being by the labor of a lifetime, spoke to all men in all conditions and helped make them whole."

Terry Teachout

It's a great read that will make any openhearted reader fall in love with Louis Armstrong. What a gift.

Robin D.G. Kelley is a professor of history and American studies, the author of books on cultural history and race, and a music journalist. Kelley is also a musician and, most importantly, spent 14 years researching this recently published biography of Thelonious Monk, including a two-year "archaeological dig" through the storage space Monk's widow maintained. Exclusive interviews with family members and friends add more depth to Kelley's archival discoveries of long-forgotten photos and recordings among Monk's medical bills and old receipts.



Thelonious Monk: The Life and Times of an American Original
Robin D.G. Kelley
Free Press
608 p. cloth. $39.99

Thelonius Monk

Robin D.G. Kelley

Kelley uses these raw ingredients to reveal day-to-day life of the man behind Monk's mask of inscrutable cool. Instead of the eccentric character in perennial shades and funny hats, Kelley conjures-up a hard working family man who lives in harrowing conditions with subtle grace and humour until over medication for mental illness stills his creative passion.

Monk's Carolina roots and long life in a New York neighborhood with his extended family are essential influences on this narrative. His working life was plagued with drug woes and misunderstanding. Monk was both revered and the butt of jokes. Few understood his greatness and wisdom during his lifetime, and he was more often lauded for his weirdness. Since his death Monk has gained greater fame for his idiosyncratic compositions and equally unique playing on record.

Although Monk's bands could be hotbeds of emerging young stars like John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Randy Weston and Jackie McLean, the pianist is probably best known for his work with lesser sidemen like longtime saxophonist Charlie Rouse. Kelley's book presents Monk as a teacher whose method was a non-verbal trial of fire. The author fleshes out bandstand and studio encounters with insightful pocket biographies of each of the players, adding valuable depth and historical resonance to the story of the hard working, but fragile artist. Monk's illness slowly overtook him, but not before he helped birth modern jazz, grounding it in the gospel, blues, and Tin Pan Alley pop tunes that he loved.

A jazz master who led a tragic, ultimately transcendent life, Monk created music that is unique and authoritative, playful and soulful. Kelley presents the flesh and blood man behind the shadowy legend. It will send you racing to your stereo and Monk's music again, and that's a gift too.

Joseph Blake writes on international travel for many journals and is jazz columnist for PRRB.

BANDIT LOVE

Carol Cooper

Straddling the gap between investigative journalism and true-crime fiction come the multi-ethnic writers of Mediterranean Noir. In 2007 the PEN "World Voices" Writer's Festival showcased several panel discussions featuring crime novelists from France, Italy, Spain, and North Africa whose work in translation was finally reaching American readers largely through Europa Editions, the American division of Italy's classiest indie imprint. Initially popularized on the cusp of the 1990s when French author Jean-Claude Izzo made mystery/thrillers set in his native Marseilles function as progressive social commentary, this genre is pop entertainment with a moral compass. Novelists subsequently inspired by Izzo appropriate Chandler's cool , Hammett's cynicism, Cain's irony and Leonard's black humor to describe the fragile socio-economic structures of post- Cold War Europe the better to craft stories which lay bare the ongoing class- wars, racial bigotry and governmental corruption that threaten European stability.

Bandit Love
Massimo Carlotto
Europa Editions
2010, $18.50 Cdn.

In adapting the stylized amorality of classic American noir to fit contemporary European settings, Mediterranean noirists add more political backstory than most Americans are used to. Readers learn about the various paramilitary mafias which mushroomed in the aftermath of perestroika and the Bosnian war, as well as about lingering feuds in parts of Spain and Italy against families historically sympathetic to the Fascists. Every flavor of divisive extremism is touched upon. Biggest irony? That European capitalist nation-states should be falling apart along ethnic, religious or partisan lines more "tribal" than those of the former African and Asian colonies Europe has made mimic the amalgamated nation-state model for decades. No wonder some of the most successful authors in this genre have journalistic and/or leftist backgrounds that may even have sent them to jail or into hiding among the marginalized characters who populate their books. Which brings us to Italy's Massimo Carlotto, a former political refugee who survived six years in prison and 11 redundant trials – whose *Bandit Love* comes out in English from Europa this October.

* * *

The first book Carlotto wrote after his legal battles resolved in an official pardon from the Italian President in 1993 was "The Fugitive": a sardonic memoir of his life on the lam in France and Mexico after his lawyers encouraged him to flee imminent reincarceration in 1982. Of the many essays, articles, plays, and novels he has published since, none have steered far from his original agenda of educational outreach as a teen member of Lotta Continua (a far-left organization from which the more militant Linea Prima splinter group emerged in the mid-1970s). Whether writing about Columbian drug mules, Euro-laundering schemes, or the activist mothers of "disappeared" citizens in Argentina, Carlotto is intent on using fiction to reveal truths which escape contemporary news media. With *Bandit Love* he returns to the reliable device of the serial novel to give his public a 20/20 peek into the multinational heart of darkness.

Massimo Carlotto

It is worth noting that this is the first of Carlotto's already popular "Alligator" mysteries released by his stateside publisher. The prose style of this potboiler is much less polished than that of earler Carlotto titles from Europa Editions, including "Poisonville" – last year's elegant collaboration with Marco Videtta. Full of short, choppy, often repetitive sentences and profanity laden dialogue, "Bandit Love" has no high literary pretensions. Clearly the book's gritty simplicity is a deliberate evocation of the downbeat voice and depressed reality of Marco "The Alligator" Burrati, whose sloppy, unvarnished mythos was created for the blue-collar masses not for college lit majors.

Part average-joe, part hapless screwup, Marco is an ex-jailbird who served 7 years for helping the wrong stranger at the wrong time then refusing to turn false witness to convict others. Upon release he parlays his interrupted education and his new familiarity with the criminal underground into a career as an unlicensed private dick. He's a borderline alcoholic who collects blues records and whose youthful idealism survives in his willingness to take the money of angry cuckholds who pay him to tail a cheating spouse while refusing to rat the woman out if the affair was harmless and she wants to stay married. Loyal to his friends and nervously ambivalent towards his enemies, The Alligator is the perfect slippery protagonist for today's shifting, confusing times.

The first five "Alligator" novels, a series launched in 1997, read like a secret history of the political legacy of May 1968. In the course of giving his readers contemporary detective stories, Carlotto makes them wonder who exactly *were* the thousands of individuals – male and female, young and old – who filled the streets of major cities throughout Europe and Latin America to challenge the global hegemony of consumer capitalism, NATO, and multinational corporations? Not all were idealistic revolutionaries, not all were psycopathic thrill seekers…but a mixture of both went variously to jail, to the graveyard, or into hiding when street protests gave way to kidnappings, assassinations and armed bank jobs. In Italy in particular once demonstrators upped their response to perceived injustice from civil disobedience to armed struggle, they saw themselves redefined as criminals. Suddenly "opposition groups" were labeled "terrorist groups," encouraging a civilian and governmental backlash which blew Italy's organized left into a million chaotic, effectively dysfunctional pieces.

Changing the terminology used to discuss protest movements not only distorts media coverage but also the average citizen's moral compass…an unintended consequence that is frequently discussed in Carlotto's books.

The bigger picture to which his plots always allude is one in which crime, its victims and it's consequences, are global. And as a result his books typically feature an international cast of characters and multiple border crossings, even when the bulk of the story takes place in a single country. Issues around immigration,importation, worker's rights, outsourcing, and globalization are just as important to the interior logic of "Bandit Love" as believable descriptions of police corruption and criminal activity.

Two of the central protagonists of *Bandit Love* met while in prison, but only one of the three is a genuine outlaw by trade and choice. The titular bandit here is Old Rossini, a smuggler who wears a gold bracelet to honor every man he had to kill. When he loses the love of his life in a revenge kidnapping, he asks his semi-retired partners, the Alligator and Max La Memoria to help him find the girl and kill her abductors. This premise becomes the pretext for a narrative that explores white slavery, the probable source of counterfeit meds on the Internet; the strategic placement of Mafia safe houses; and governmental complicity in major drug crimes. Yet stitching such scandalous plot points together are compassionate themes like love, honor,and the pursuit of happiness! Carlotto frequently interupts scenes of mayhem and suspense with elegaic odes to all three.

Told from the Alligator's own skewed perspective, this is a tale with no heroes and no innocents, so how dare any of its flawed characters even dream of deserving happiness? Well, because the pursuit of happiness is the only motivation for anything – good or bad – that humans do. On some profound level The Alligator – surely the most contemplative of Carlotto's dramatic leads – recognizes this all-pervasive motivation in even the most perverse and ruthless people he encounters. And neurotic cynic that he is, he finds this epiphany both beautiful and tragic.

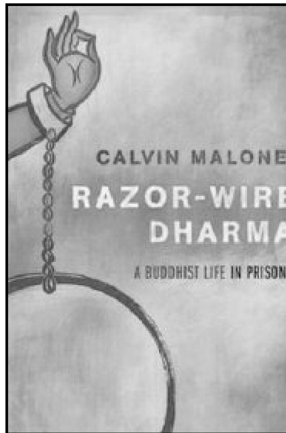
Noir literature proposes "no light/no exit" scenarios by definition, so we can't expect *Bandit Love* to give us a happy ending. But in an abrupt conclusion that is anything but clean, this book allows us the provisional satisfaction of learning that Old Rossini will continue his war against those who stole away his happiness until death or victory makes him stop. An awed Alligator observes: "…in order to keep a promise made to his love, he'd be risking his life according to rules that none of his enemies knew or could understand. This was bandit love." And this is also Massimo Carlotto's sly reminder to those who may not be up on their Che, that love is the sole motivation of the true revolutionary.

Carol Cooper is a freelance culture critic at the **Village Voice.** *She is the author of* **Pop Culture Considered as an Uphill Bicycle Race.** *She lives in New York City.*

Razor-wire Dharma

Patrick Carolan

Practicing loving compassion and mindfulness can be difficult at the best of times, but in *Razor-wire Dharma,* author and federal penitentiary inmate Calvin Malone gives readers a glimpse of the trials and tribulations faced while trying to follow the Way in the most extreme circumstances. Malone, a convicted felon nearing the end of a 20-year sentence, recounts the stories and lessons he has learned during a lifetime of incarceration and how a chance exposure to Buddhism through a cellmate blossomed into a fulfilling, and perhaps life-saving practice. Each short chapter takes the form of a dharma talk as Malone explains how the encounter has contributed to his growth as a Buddhist. Many, such as "Essential Oil," a tale in which Malone confronts a "jailhouse thief," or "Derrick," one in which he describes the drudging procession of new inmates being off-loaded from a cattle-car in chains, are classic scenes that will be familiar to anyone acquainted with the prison genre. The resulting effect is that the book is familiar and entertaining. Yet many of his tales are of mundane encounters that reveal the sheer loneliness, monotony and frustration of day-to-day prison life, and their inclusion adds a real air of honesty and authenticity to the work. Nevertheless, whether from staring down Neo-Nazis out for blood during prison riots, to dealing with time-wasting inmates more interested in staving off their own boredom than truly learning about Buddhist practice, there is always deeper meaning in Malone's stories.



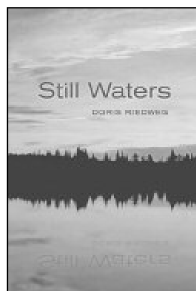
Razor-wire Dharma
Calvin Malone
Wisdom Books, 2008

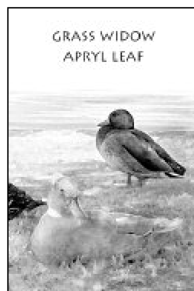
Given the autobiographical nature of *Razor-wire Dharma*, the dharma-talk format often feels jarring. The narrative tends to jump around, as the author's intention is to convey meaning through his stories, rather than provide an exact chronological account of his life. For readers interested in piecing the details together, this can be difficult due to the flux and impermanence of an existence punctuated by constantly changing cellmates, institution switches and assorted odd jobs, all of which Malone notes are facts of life in the American prison system. Additionally, the ending comes very abruptly, though its simplicity is affecting.

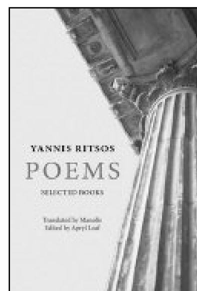
Buddha in jail

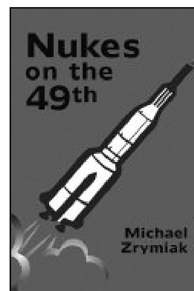
The raw emotion and honesty conveyed throughout the book is also moving, particularly that it is expressed by someone living in an environment where such expressiveness can be tantamount to signing one's own death warrant. At one point, Malone explicitly detains his darkest desire for revenge, chillingly recounting how he planned to exact vengeance on a man who once wronged his family. In doing so, he explores some of the deepest depths of human hatred and obsession, as well as what is required to pull oneself back from such an abyss. But more than this, he shows how he finally found true satisfaction by letting the idea go, emphasising that sometimes it is not merely material possessions to which we can become too attached. Throughout the book, criticism of the prison system is presented, outlining its numerous inherent contradictions and flaws. It is scathing and well-articulated, but while it clearly comes from a place of dissatisfaction, it is not overly resentful or excessive, a fact that is likely attributable to Malone's own practice. Oddly, Malone never discusses or even mentions the offence for which he was sentenced to 20 years in prison. However, this could be because he views his imprisonment more as the result of the destructive lifestyle he lead before finding Buddhism, rather than due to one specific crime. Regardless, *Razor-wire Dharma* is great material for any Buddhist reader looking for something a little different, or for fans of the crime and Big House genres looking for the same.

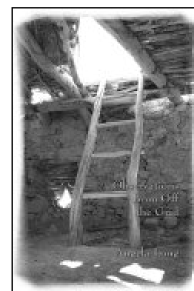
Patrick Carolan is a graduate student in Cognitive Biological and Forensic Psychology at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver. His research involves Neuroimaging techniques to better understand violence-risk in criminal offenders.

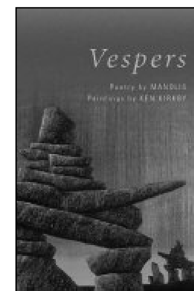












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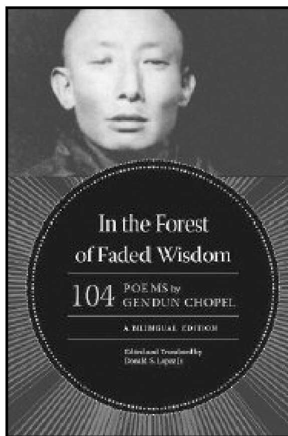
Joys and Lamentations from Tibet

Trevor Carolan

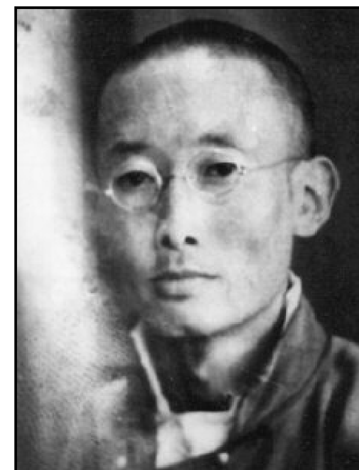
The subject of a recent French film by Luc Schaedler, Tibet's best-known modern poet Gendun Chopel (1903-1951) has become an increasingly controversial figure. Born into the tantric Nyingma Buddhist tradition of northeast Amdo province, he was recognized at the age of five as a reincarnated Lama. At twelve, with a prodigious talent for complex Himalayan poetics he entered Gelukpa monastic training. He earned renown as a rhetorician and *tangka* painter, but proved an unruly student. Delegated to assist Rahul Sankrityayan (1893-1963) an Indian scholar on literary-theological research in Lhasa, Gendun Chopel followed the returning scholar to India in 1934.



In the Forest of Faded Wisdom: 104 Poems by Gendun Chopel
Ed. and trans. by
Donald S. Lopez
Univ. Chicago Press
2009 U.S. $26.

As a gifted linguist he wandered the subcontinent, still under British rule, until 1946 and acquired classical Sanskrit, Pali and assorted vernaculars en route. During longer stays at Calcutta, Kalimpong, and for a year in Buddhist Ceylon, and with European scholars he also helped translate important works from, and into, Tibetan. He also gained a deep familiarity with English and Western customs. Much of his travel experience from these times is included in his *Golden Chronicle, the Story of a Cosmopolitan's Pilgrimage,* a 600 page compendium of his observations on the lands, peoples and other faith traditions he encountered during his travels. It also included his expatriate reflections on Tibet itself.

In his excellent introductory essay to this edition, Donald Lopez from the University of Chicago notes that the Chronicle contained "the first Tibetan discussion on Western science" and, tellingly, a "scathing critique of colonialism." Here begins the controversy over the meaning and importance of Gendun Chopel's work. His poetry shows how he aimed to reconcile the sacred and beautiful with the profane, political, and exploitative in life. Ironically, given his eventual political importance, his most popular work remains a guidebook to the sacred sites of the Buddha Life still that is used by Tibetan pilgrims. Not as well known, but available in English translation by Jeffrey Hopkins, is his *Treatise on Passion*, a sex manual he researched initially through Sanskrit erotica, then having "dropped the robe" and leaving holy orders, through plunging into Calcutta's brothels.



Gendun Chopel

While his adventures were the stuff of legend, Gendun Chopel never stopped writing poetry. As these lucid translations by Lopez show, there is plenty of Milarepa, Tibet's beloved "singing yogi" in Gendun Chopel's style. Recalibrating classic Vajrayana themes, his poetic voice is coaching, exhortative—on worldly experience, passion, suffering, the joys of natural phenomena. Alas, shortly after his return to Lhasa this rare, well-travelled native intellectual was arrested, tortured and imprisoned, his critical work suppressed—likely, Lopez suggests based on evidence, with British counsel: during his years in India Gendun Chopel made no secret of his contempt for colonialism, and he did write for the only Tibetan language newspaper of the day, *Melong* (Tibetan Mirror) published by his Tibetan Christian friend Dorje Tarchin, in Kalimpong near Darjeeling. Released after two years, he died a broken man in the lowest stews of Lhasa.

Tragically, lacking vital cosmopolitan experience in its national leadership Tibet's independence followed soon after. In a cover statement, Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche writes that "if at the time of Gundun Chopel, the Tibetan people and the Tibetan government had lent even half an ear to him and acted accordingly, I have no doubt that Tibet and the Tibetan people would be in a different position than they are today. A better one…" That about sums it all up too well.

Trevor Carolan is the international editor for the PRRB.

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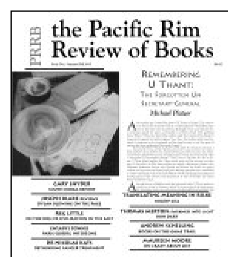
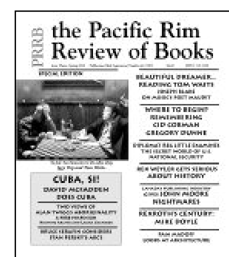
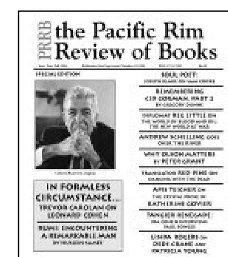
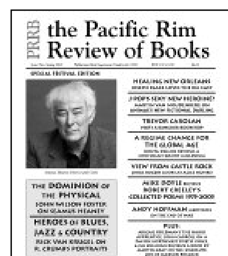
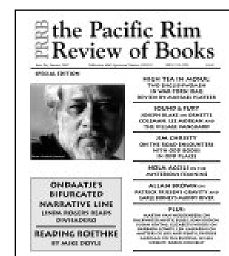
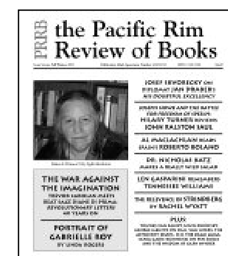
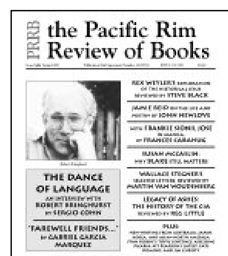
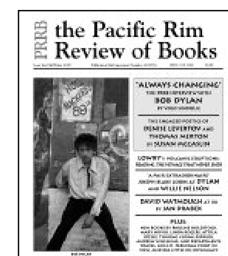
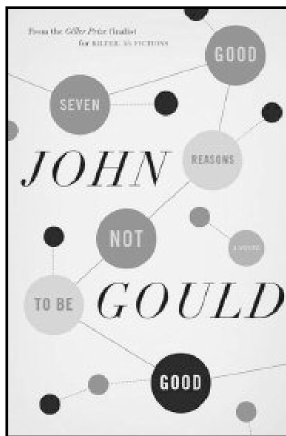










On Taking Charge of One's Life

Eric Spalding

Matt, the forty-four-year-old protagonist of John Gould's novel *Seven Good Reasons Not to Be Good*, is not faring well. His girlfriend has left him for another woman and he no longer feels at home living with her and her new partner. He's also lost his job as a film critic for a Vancouver weekly. It's in this context that he returns to his hometown, Toronto, for seven days. In doing so, Matt has two main goals: he wants to convince his best friend, who has AIDS, to resume taking his medication instead of letting himself die and he wants to reconnect with his father before the elderly man succumbs to dementia. The novel takes place over the week-long span of Matt's stay in Toronto.



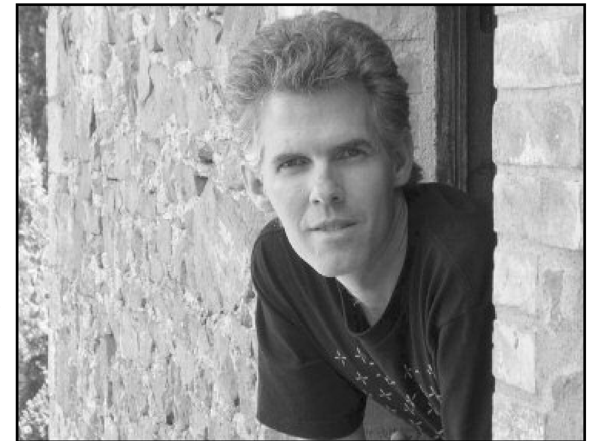
Seven Good Reasons Not to Be Good
John Gould
HarperCollins, 2010
353 pp.

In describing these seven days, John Gould could be said to engage in what anthropologists call "thick description", as he fills the reader in on all significant aspects of Matt's life from his present to his past. We learn about his relationship to his ex-girlfriend, to his best friend and to his father. We also learn about his successes and failures at work. Gould has an eye for detail. We really feel that we're there with Matt, seeing and hearing everything that he's seeing and hearing. The main characters are vividly described as well. One of the standouts is Kate, a guest at the posh hotel in Toronto where Matt is living beyond his meagre means. The two of them quickly fall into bed together. Kate is quick-witted, and provides smart responses to Matt's metaphysical musings as well as comforting advice for his various problems.

After a while, however, I started to get impatient with Matt. He procrastinates so much that I found myself thinking, "Just go ahead and meet your best friend. And visit your dad!" Matt himself reflects on the slow progress he's making, with a filmic reference that's in keeping with his former occupation:

> *If this trip were a movie – such is Matt's thought as he squelches back down the hall to his room – it would suck so far.*
>
> *Guy holes up in a hoity-toity hotel. He shivers and sweats, fires off the odd email, places the odd phone call. He heads out for a stroll in the suburban barrens, or for a sneaky recon mission, or for a quickie with a puzzling stranger. Sure, there's a bit of moral conundrum taking shape – save the sick guy? Let him have his big gesture? – but do you really need that sort of grief when you're kicking back on the couch?* (p. 142).

In *The Writing Life*, Annie Dillard remarks that, ideally, a novel should not be filmable; novels should aim to accomplish what movies can't. In the case of John Gould's novel, the reader gets inside the head of Matt in a way that no film could. However, I was starting to wish for the momentum that a feature normally provides. Matt was such a passive protagonist that, soon after reading the above passage, I set the novel aside for several days.


John Gould, photo by Sandy Mayzell

I'm glad that I picked the book up again, because just when I was starting to think that the story wasn't going anywhere, something happens: a character makes a revelation that will force Matt into becoming more active. At this point, Matt himself observes, "Hey things can actually *happen.* Who knew?? (p. 227). Later still, he wonders again whether his story would play well as a feature film: "And it occurs to him, man, if this were a movie, it sure would've picked up over these last couple of days. Chase scene, road trip, reams of startling revelations. The protagonist's under a whole new kind of pressure, implicated in the crime he's been trying to prevent. And now..." (p. 324).

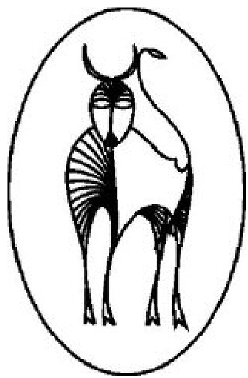
In its closing pages, the mood of the book changes. A more resolute and serious tone replaces the self-pity and self-deprecating humour. For instance, Matt reminisces about the eulogy that he pronounced years before at his mother's funeral:

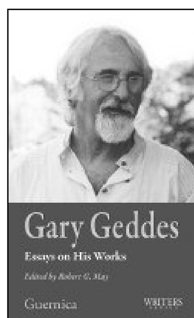
> *What did he focus on? His mum's sly humour, which so few people ever really got. Her painstaking intelligence, which remained almost entirely unexpressed (those twelve years at Timely Temps not quite the career she deserved). Her tenderness in the home, which was twisted out of shape by the loss of her daughter. It was only afterwards that Matt recognized, and lamented, the fact that he'd spoken mostly about what his mum* hadn't *done, about the life that had never made it out of her body and into the world. He added this blunder to his burden of grief, which threatened to break him right open* (p. 331).

These reflections about his mother are relevant to the hopeful conclusion of the novel, when Matt resolves to become more active in his life, to assume more responsibility for his problems – and perhaps to merit someday a eulogy on what he *has* done rather than what he hasn't.

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

Getting To Know A West Coast Icon





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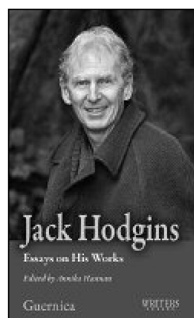

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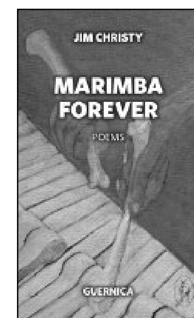
A master of magic realism Hodgins has set his novels in rural Vancouver Island and thus raised this place to mythic levels.



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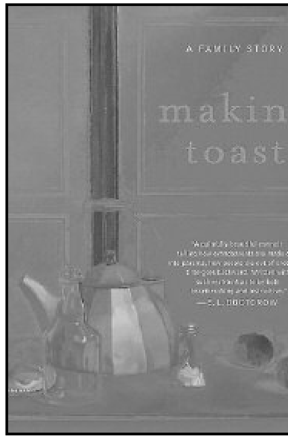
From Guernica Editions' Newest Releases

Days Are to Be Happy In

Richard Wirick

The poignancy of this Larkin line is hammered home in this vivid new memoir just out from *Time* columnist Roger Rosenblatt. When Rosenblatt's adult daughter, Amy, died of an asymptomatic heart ailment in 2007 (and on her home treadmill, no less), he and his wife drove to Amy's home in Maryland. A prominent pediatrician, his daughter had three children under seven at the time of her death. One of them, granddaughter Jessie, asked Rosenblatt how long he and his wife were staying. "Forever" said the author.



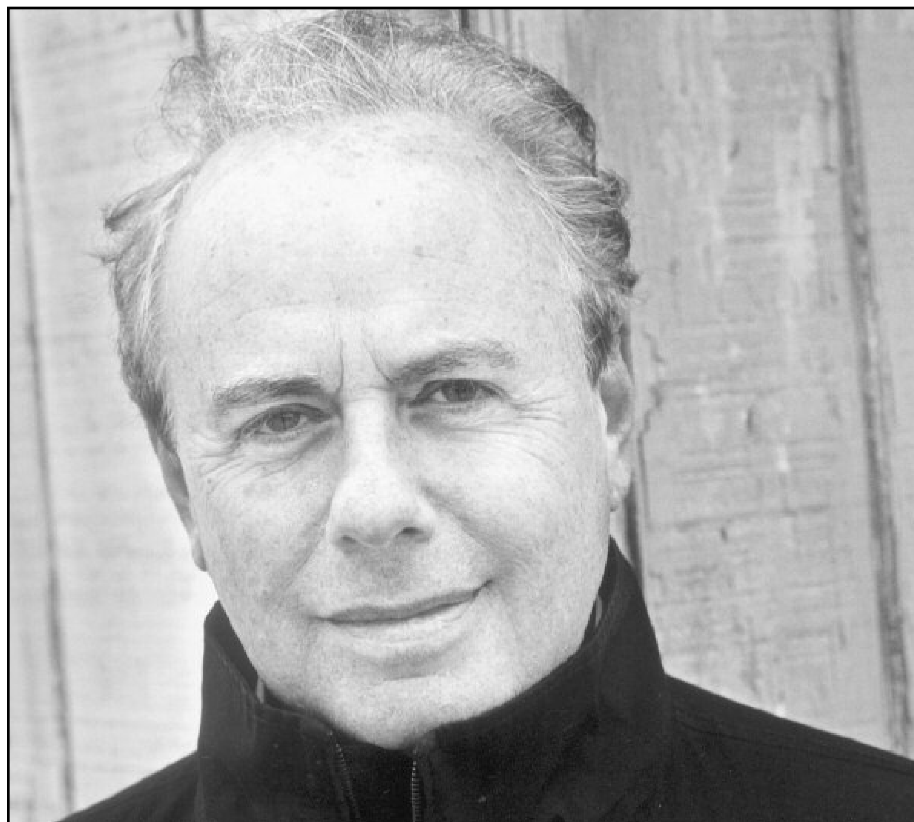
Making Toast
Roger Rosenblatt
Ecco, 287 pages

This memoir captures the ensuing year with captivating, insightful vignettes of the three grandchildren living the lives of primary school waifs and masters. The grandson Sammy enters kindergarten, that forbidding portal to academia slathered over with all the innocent detritus of the nursery. Jessie loses at least one tooth. James, a.k.a Bubbles, learns to talk, speech descending upon him in the hypnogogic haze he inhabits between grief and non-comprehension of death.

Rosenblatt is not reluctant to reveal his own profound and terrible grief. But he and his wife – re-naming themselves Boppo and Mimi – resolve to channel this negative energy into structuring "the choreography of everyday life" so essential to young children, for whom routine is the referent for all other aspects of existence. Rosenblatt and wife continue their daughter's ornate breakfasts, the kid's piano lessons, even cross-country vacations with all their pet-congested, loss-plagued, vehicular foibles. Rosenblatt, himself a poet, uses as a framing device Yeats's great "Poem For My Daughter," and these lines reify the sanctity of sameness to very young minds: "How but in custom and in ceremony/Are innocence and beauty born?"

Indeed, Rosenblatt saw in his daughter all that Yeats's poem wishes for a female offspring. The author speaks of her as a living presence visiting him with all her tones and texture in the venues where she was most a mom and a daughter: "The distance of death reveals Amy's stature to me. My daughter mattered to the histories of others. Knowing that did not prevent my eyes from welling up with tears for no apparent reason in Ledo's Pizza the other day. But it is something."

The tightness of Rosenblatt's prose, its overall economy, is also fresh and revitalizing. Rosenblatt is a poet, essayist, playwright, and screenwriter, and he tackles the overused genre of memoir with appropriate openness, balanced at the same time with restraint and dignity. As one communicator opined: "What is the worst a parent can contemplate? The death of a child. And the next most awful thing? Her own death, before her children are ready to lose her" [Dinah Lenney].



Roger Rosenblatt, photo by Nigel Parry

Rosenblatt carries on in the only way he can: honoring his daughter by passing on the love he had for her directly to her issue without sentimentality, self-pity, or overstatement of her struggle. The book is wise and generous, and, again to quote Yeats, "inhabits that eerie realm of life-in-death and death-in-life." This is accomplished by Rosenblatt's fostering a respect and love for the quotidian, the "crap-work" of everyday life that creates patterns of safety and comfort not just for his charges, but for him, his wife and son-in-law. Sometimes it detracts from his writing, but life itself must come first:

> *Late one morning I am alone in the house. I*
> *cannot remember another time when this was so.*
> *Harris is at work. . . . . Sammy and Jessie are in*
> *school. Bubbies is at his gym with Ligaya. I am*
> *supposed to be writing. Instead, I wander about*
> *the empty places—-the playroom, the children's*
> *bedrooms, the halls. The only sound is the whir*
> *of the refrigerator.*

In the morning of life, we rage to live without dead time. At its evening, and with responsibilities born abundantly from our dreams, we settle into routines that provide depths of understanding and a new alacrity of mind. Rosenblatt's becomes in the end the most sanguine sort of grief-memoir, a demonstration of the joy that is born hiding, then slowly comprehending, its contrary.

Richard Wirick is the author of **One Hundred Siberian Postcards** *(Telegram Books). He has been published in* **Paris Review** *and* **The Nation.** *He has recently published the collection of stories,* **Kicking It,** *from Counterpoint Press. He practices law in Los Angeles.*

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Scarecrow

poetry & art by
Duncan Regehr

At the crossroads of life, the scarecrow watches the world with eyes both patient and protesting, aware of the paradox of it's own being – tethered in humanity and brother to the wind. In *Scarecrow*, a remarkable first book of poetry, artist, author and actor Duncan Regehr explores the metaphor of line – the line of verse, the line of the pencil, the lay lines of the land of the scarecrow's domain – in an artistic vision that is both penetrating and prophetic. From the ordinary to the surreal, Regehr's work invites the reader into an elemental universe where nature and culture are in constant interplay on a dancing gyre of shadow and truth.

Duncan Regehr works in the literary, visual and performing arts. Among his published works, *The Dragon's Eye*, *Corvus Rex*, *Chrysalid* and *Scarecrow* combine prose, poetry and visual imagery. His paintings are found in collections and galleries worldwide. Also a classically trained actor, he performs and directs for stage, film, radio and television. He is a Royal Canadian Artist, a recipient of the American Vision Award of Distinction in the Arts, and holds a Doctorate of Fine Arts, honoris causa from the University of Victoria.

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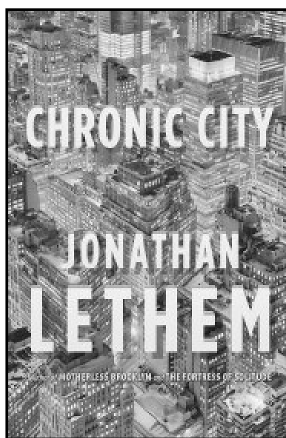
Chronic City

Nadine Lucas

Chronic City is an ambitious, often riveting new novel by genius grant recipient Jonathan Lethem. The story is narrated by former child star, socialite Chase Insteadman. Chase spends his evenings orbiting the minefields of Manhattan's social elite while his astronaut fiancé Janice Trumbull orbits minefields in outer space. Unable to return to earth, Janice writes Chase rapturous love letters. In the midst of all this Chase befriends pop culture raconteur/eccentric Perkus Tooth, and as their friendship evolves, Chase is forced to grapple between his public celebrity identity and his authentic self.



Chronic City
Jonathan Lethem
Vintage, 2010

Much like Lethem's previous novel *Fortress of Solitude*, this is a story of friendship. There are other interesting characters in this book but it is the bond that develops between Perkus Tooth and Chase Insteadman that is the most significant. Manhattan also exists as a formidable character. Lethem portrays the island as a surreal, exaggerated version of itself. A tiger that may or may not be real ravages the city and the streets are shrouded in a fog that bears the heady scent of chocolate. People covet the mysterious "chaldron" an object that does not in fact exist except in a hologram. Amidst the dream-like elements of the novel Lethem skillfully depicts the disparity in Manhattan's social strata. There is the moneyed elite with their opulent parties but there is also Perkus Tooth a person working and struggling to pay the rent. There is also Biller, a street person and computer genius. Lethem evokes the mythological perception of Manhattan a city that is a creation of will, aspiration and money and contrasts this with depictions of ordinary people who struggle to survive day to day within the city.

This mythical and real aspects of Manhattan are further exemplified in the character of Perkus who is obsessed with maintaining his own version of Manhattan, that is, a Manhattan which only existed at a certain place and time. The music of Chet Baker, New Yorker Magazine, and Marlon Brando are all part of his diorama. This passion for cultural collecting at first sustains Perkus but eventually contribute to his undoing. His identification and reverence tip over into madness. This is strikingly evoked in the novel, how cultural collecting is really a search to give life meaning but how we can over identify with it. For many readers such as myself who revere movies, music and literature this is particularly resonant. The relationship between Perkus and Chase begins as tutor and protégé. Perkus becomes the link that assists Chase with moving from an atmosphere of placid compliance and self-delusion to one of clarity and self-determination.

Jonathan Lethem

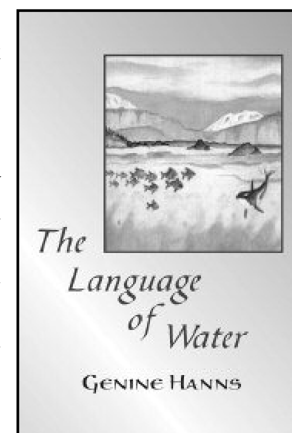
Chronic City is also a love story. The letters from Chase's astronaut fiancé are a particular highlight showcasing Lethem's fluid, meticulous prose. His descriptions of Manhattan are detailed and vivid. Lethem moves deftly from the otherworldly and romantic domain of outer space to the gritty day to day reality of life in New York City. The character of Chase Insteadman evolves from vapid ex-celebrity to someone altogether more soulful and relatable. This is thanks to Lethem's deft storytelling. *Chronic City* is a rich novel about the search for authenticity and meaning. Its an intricate novel, not easy to summarize but well worth the effort.

Nadine Lucas is a writer and filmmaker. She lives in Victoria BC and is writing a book based on comic book heroes.

The Language of Water

Elizabeth Rhett Woods

Let me establish my biases: First; I like stories, whether in prose or poetry, I want to know what has happened, is happening, or is about to happen; I prefer rivers to lakes, or deep, meditative ponds.



The Language of Water
Ekstasis Editions, 2009

Another bias is laziness. I like poems that make me think, but which do so by sparking fresh thoughts of my own, and not by asking for the kind of thinking required to puzzle out metaphors related to the poet's private life and situation, the reader's ignorance closing them out from both the metaphor, and the poem, rather than inviting them into a familiar place made new and strange and invigorating by language.

The Language of Water is Genine Hanns first book-length collection of poetry, and like most collections, whether first or last, is uneven in depth and execution. Having said that, when Genine Hanns writes well, she writes very, very well, as in "Waiting for the White Bears", which tells a story without a plot, the story of a journey both mythical and physical; its details clear and open, offering places for the reader to pause and savour and enlarge their understanding.

Hanns can also be deftly humourous as in "Reflections on the Pregnant Pause" in which a poet's performance at a poetry reading, and pregnancy are incongruously, but effectively, juxtaposed with the coupling of bacon and eggs, "The poet steps back/having completed/her delivery".

But in other poems her use of metaphors, vivid though they are—perhaps because they are so vivid—clogs the flow of the poem, presents a colourful but dense wall of sound and syntax that offers no opening for the reader's enquiring mind, or emotions, as in, "The almost night grew large/ and obsidian; too big for one," –which is grand, but impenetrable, from "What the Large Night Left", or a longer example from "Arbutus Woman",

> *I emerge like Arion*
> *from the world of fins and dreams*
> *and ride into the middle of the Pacific*
> *on the backs of primordial sea turtles.*

This is beautifully written, but what does it mean? I accept that the reader, as well as the writer, has their own work to do in completing the meaning of a poem (or of any work of art), and looked up Arion—a Greek poet, captured by pirates and rescued by dolphins—but one needs an opening, or a hook, a means of entering the public square where the writer's private life intersects with the universal experience (or, at least, I do) or else one might as well write poems of one's own, glosas on the originals. On Hanns' own fine glosa, perhaps, "The Language of Pines" based on a stanza by Gwendolyn MacEwan.

Genine Hanns

However, it is also possible to argue that one should not look for meaning, or a story, in every poem, but ride the waves of sense and sound as one would ride a dolphin, were one ever to be so lucky. Those capable of surrendering to the poet's music without demanding sense in every syllable will enjoy cruising through *The Language of Water.*

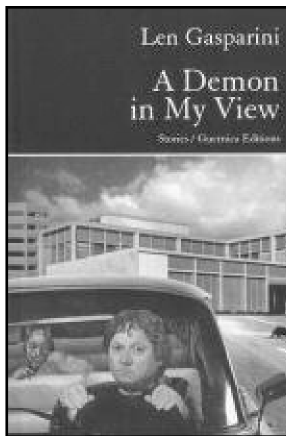
***Elizabeth Rhett Woods has published five books of poetry and three novels. Her most recent book is* Woman Walking: Selected Poems.**

Len Gasparini: Heading Home

Linda Rogers

It is always dangerous asking a woman to review the writing of a boy's boy. However, the *Body Worlds* exhibition, which shows us that skin is only the receptacle of our twenty-one grams and its complex infrastructure, reminds the female critic that there is a lot going on beneath the testosterone driven top layer of flesh that doesn't necessarily reveal itself on the first peel.

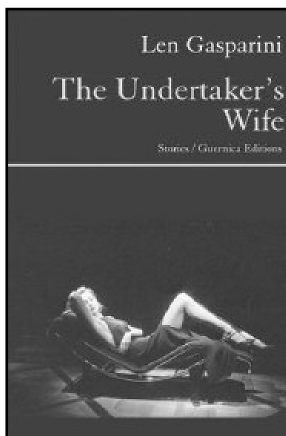
A first reading of Len Gasparini, longer ago than he probably wants to remember, bespoke of a truck driver plowing through fresh fields of inadequately rooted Italian girls. "Lock up your daughters" this critic wrote about poetry that was often more pen than ink. But was that fair? The writer didn't think so.



A Demon in My View
Len Gasparini
Guernica Editions, 2003

Now Gasparini, the idiosyncratic poet obsessed with undressing plaster Madonnas and their pulchritudinous *sorelle*, is a mature voyageur, his road broadened to the four narrative lanes on North American highways. Those roads, the ones taken and not taken, wear the patina of men who change their minds.

Rubber bears witness to brave-hearts who stop and start and reverse direction. You can smell it on the pages of Gasparini's books. It is the scent of nostalgia and regret. And he isn't spraying Manguard or whatever passes for reality fumigant on any of it. In this season of "clever" writing, the big schism between head and heart, the top and bottom notes of plainspeak in Gasparini's mostly first person narratives are as welcome as frangipani riding the Japanese Current from the South Pacific. *His* prose smells like real earth in the hothouse of artifice.



The Undertaker's Wife
Len Gasparini
Guernica Editions, 2007

In the story "Wild Pitch," from the collection *A Demon in My View*, life seen through his rear view mirror, Gasparini compares baseball and poetry unpacking the arguable veracity of Cy Young's statement, "Pitchers like poets are born and not made." That may be true but there is also grace in the effort to endure, despite and even because of the failure to reach perfection. If perfection were the only desideratum, then the human race and writer Len Gasparini would both be redundant.

The thing is, in stories where the muse (a toss up: Edgar Alan Poe or Mary Magdalen) and the pitching arm fail and the omniscient observer swoops in for sex as with the sexually ambivalent husband and his unsatisfied wife "Frank and Millie" in *The Undertaker's Wife*, a more recent but still stubbornly fami(g)liar collection, the voyageur is fearless. His pen goes everywhere. It does not discriminate. It does not stop to check for stutters and dangling modifiers. It does not censor itself in tidy little pirouettes around dog mess on the carpet. That is not the stuff of bravery. As any good dancer knows, when you lead with your heart, the right foot will follow.

Len Gasparini

They are always on the move, his jiving "I's, mostly in vintage cars driven by guy's guys with cigarette packages folded in the sleeves of their T shirts. Once in a while, they rev the engines in mating displays. Sometimes they take a wrong turn. Always, the chicks notice. We notice. These multiple "I's are people worthy of our attention because they live from the ground up, answering yes to the checklist of things needed for the drive through life. Feet, yes! Peckers, yes! Tickers, sure! Noggins, sometimes!

It doesn't matter whether or not Gasparini's voyageur is autobiographical. He is always honest and that is refreshing in a world of disingenuous metro-wankers.

When Does a Kiss Become a Bite
Len Gasparini
Ekstasis Editions, 2009

In *When Does A Kiss become A Bite*, his recent short story collection from Ekstasis Editions, which has made a specialty of noir auteurs, tender stalkers of the psychic night like Gasparini, Jim Christie and John Moore, he continues the picaresque tradition, a rolling stone gathering grainy photos. Those frames infused with masculine language long on torque carry the stories from beginnings to uncertain endings. For a lapsed Catholic, that uncertainty looms.

There is redemption in kindness, the aspect of gentleness that helps navigate even the most treacherous corners. In the story "Poetic Justice" Fletcher (rhymes with…) the academic falls for a mother and daughter who represent the bookends of innocence and experience. For the character defying his mortality in carnal sin and losing himself in a maze of temptation the mother is past her stale date and the daughter his logical option. Biologically speaking, that is a no brainer. Morally, it spells ruin for all of them. The academic loses his job and is murdered in an act of random justice and the daughter ends up on the street. "It is only the emotionally impaired who really experience love, he thought: which is why it is so intimately linked with tragedy."

In the story "Graveyard Shift," which concludes the latest collection, Gasparini, who sometimes navigates a sentence like a husband forced to take dance lessons, delivers a visceral punch in a turn of phrase no woman could have concocted, "When George Bozin's wife left him, he was like a man who had died standing up." Even horses wouldn't have thought of that wonderful image, and they know stand-up. This level of self-awareness is Gasparini's high note.

When *does* a kiss become a bite? There are three answers to the question: always, sometimes and never. It all depends on point of view. The view through the rear view mirror is almost always sweeter. Gasparini's fictional world, in spite of his grainy film noir realism, is nostalgic. Three books written over a decade move forward and the driver sits firmly at the wheel. He is a traveler (albeit ever closer to the end of the road) with the guts to keep on driving. The final story ends in a noose, with implied redemption. The narrator will be saved for another ride in the desert of temptation.

The cohabitation of shadow and light in this and other stories is a catholic preoccupation. No matter how far the narrator drives, the past is still written in the gestalt of his journey. He may be driving toward Poe and Southern Gothic, but there is a Bible in his glove compartment.

In "The Space Between a Bed and a Chair," his account of a hotel meeting with Tennessee Williams, Gasparini quotes the great playwright, "The human heart has no straight lines." Assuming it travels in circles or deviates to intersect with other heartlines, we see the gestalt of stories that intend to connect. That is what compels us.

Linda Rogers used to be a novelist, but now she is a back seat driver.

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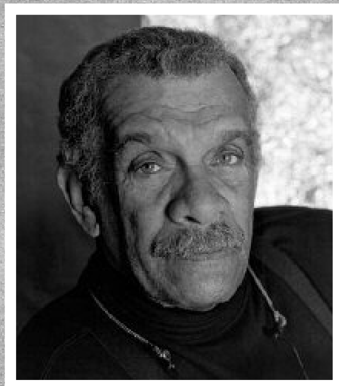
The WELL & EKSTASIS EDITIONS present
an evening with Nobel Laureate

Derek Walcott

THE PACIFIC FESTIVAL *of the* BOOK



A Reading and Book Signing by Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott

Doors open at 7:00 PM ~ Reception at 7:30 pm
Reading at 8:00 pm ~ Signing at 9:00 pm

Saturday, November 13
The WELL, 821 Fort Street, Victoria, BC
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art by Miles Lowry

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featuring an evening with Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott

Friday, November 12
Opening Night Reception
sponsored by Ekstasis Editions
Readings by:
Bert Almon, Olga Costopoulos
Jim Christy, Stephen Scobie
Duncan Regehr, Miles Lowry
D.C. Reid, Charles Tidler

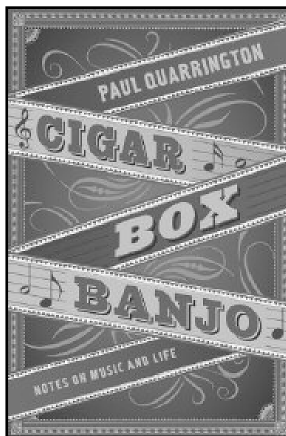
Saturday, November 13
All-day readings and book signings
1:30 - 2:30 pm - The WELL:
launch of Libros Libertad titles by Manolis and Ilya Tourtidis in translation of Yannis Ritsos and Constantine Cavafy (disembodied)
2:30 - 4:30 pm - Victoria City Hall:
Poets for Peace: George Bowering, Carla Funk
George McWhirter, Brad Cran, Linda Rogers
7:30 pm - The WELL:
An Intimate Evening with Derek Walcott

Sunday, November 14
Pancake Breakfast
Children's Events
Book signings by Derek Walcott
George Bowering, Jim Christy, George Stanley
George McWhirter and others

All events apart from Victoria City Hall readings take place at the WELL, 821 Fort Street, Victoria, BC

Reflections on Cancer and Music

Eric Spalding



Cigar Box Banjo: Notes on Music and Life
Paul Quarrington
Greystone Books
2010, 244 pages

Paul Quarrington

After reading the introduction to *Cigar Box Banjo: Notes on Music and Life* in my local Chapters, I wanted to read the rest of Paul Quarrington's book. I had not previously read any of this Ontario writer's books, although I had enjoyed the movie adaptation of his novel *Whale Music*, starring the late Maury Chaykin as a washed-up rock star moping around in his messy mansion. That novel's focus on popular music reveals an abiding interest in the topic on Quarrington's part, one that he explores further in *Cigar Box Banjo*.

However, what initially caught my interest in the introduction was Quarrington's account of his own declining health, and his learning that he had terminal lung cancer. The main lesson to emerge from this chapter is that it's unwise to ignore tell-tale signs of serious illness. Quarrington describes increasing troubles with shortness of breath that he explains to himself in different ways (lack of exercise, a vocal cord disorder, allergies), before a doctor tells him that he has cancer.

As for causes, we sometimes like to reassure ourselves by thinking that the victim somehow brought the ailment upon himself. We're reluctant to accept how arbitrary cancer and other illnesses can be. Quarrington writes that he had been a heavy smoker at times in his life, had enjoyed illicit drugs and was still a heavy drinker. But he also observes that he went for years at a time without smoking cigarettes and that he had run in marathons and even a triathlon. He writes, "What I want to get beyond is the idea that anybody's death is their fault. It could be as random as the cards dropping in a game of Omaha. You might be holding the nut cards to a low hand, but when the last community card turns up and it's a ten (meaning there ain't no low hand), all you got is squat" (p. 219).

Following the introduction, Quarrington advances on two fronts. On one, we learn about the aftermath of the Diagnosis. On the other, we learn about his life from the age of nine onwards as a fan and performer of music. Quarrington maintained my interest on both fronts. I wanted to learn how he and the people around him would handle his cancer. I also wanted to learn about his personal journey through popular music, including why he had not become better known as a musician. In this regard, Quarrington writes, "In both professions, writing and music, a practitioner stands about as much chance of real success as does a sperm cell" (p. 72). Yet on his own level, he *was* successful, touring bars and clubs and recording CDs. In the book, Quarrington also discusses some of the artists who influenced him – the Beatles, Bob Dylan, the Band and more. In addition, he describes with fondness the Toronto scene of which he was a part, and the many musicians who helped and influenced him there. For instance, he profiles Dan Hill, best known for "Sometimes When We Touch", a big hit back in 1977. He and Hill were childhood friends and went on to perform as a folk duo appropriately named Quarrington Hill in the early 1970s. The author also explains Dan Hill's current activities as a successful songwriter for hire.

On the other front, Quarrington is extremely open about how he deals with cancer. Certainly he is saddened and writes about how he cried after learning the news. But he has motivating projects to complete. Among them are the writing and recording of some songs with his band Porkbelly Futures. Four of these, performed in a country-rock vein, appear on a DVD that accompanies the book. This disc includes three songs, a music video for a fourth song and a three-minute clip promoting the book. All four of the songs are worth listening to, with the most accomplished being "Are You Ready?" (as in "Are you ready for the Great Unknown?"), which sounds to me like a lost Blue Rodeo track. Upon reading the book, one recognizes that Quarrington is very well liked, able to depend on a vast support network during his illness. In my view, the book demonstrates why he has so many friends. In it, he comes across as smart and interesting. At the same time, he seems approachable, with an endearing ability to laugh at himself. Roddy Doyle, in his foreword to *Cigar Box Banjo*, writes, "Ten minutes in the company of Paul Quarrington, and you're instantly an old friend" (p. ix). I believe him.

Similarly, Quarrington's writing is effective at drawing the reader in. It's not polished or carefully researched, but what would be flaws in another book are actually qualities in this one. Indeed, now and again, Quarrington will insert parenthetical comments, saying he's not sure if he's worded a sentence grammatically or if his facts are completely right while implying that in the end it doesn't really matter. At one point, he writes: "Woodrow Wilson Guthrie was born in Okemah, Oklahoma, in 1912, the son of a businessman, landowner, and Democratic politician. (I mean, his father was all those things; it wasn't my intention to suggest some Satanic trinity)" (p. 18). A more meticulous writer might have corrected the first sentence, but Quarrington's approach is much funnier. Also, the book unravels towards the end. The last chapter in particular reads like an odd assortment of random paragraphs. My feeling was that Quarrington did not have enough energy to fine-tune this closing section. Yet this apparent incompletion is a more moving conclusion to the book than a more conventional ending would have been. Quarrington's close friend Martin Worthy writes the final two pages, bringing the reader up to date on the author's last few weeks and his death at the age of 56.

I read this short book very fast and enthusiastically, because Quarrington was so effective at sharing his love of popular music as well as his most intimate reflections on his illness.

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

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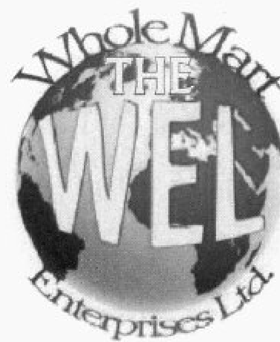

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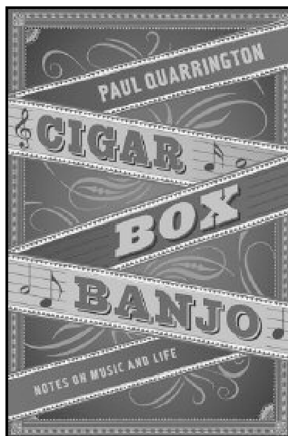
Cigar Box Banjo: Notes on Music and Life

Richard Stevenson

"Did you know Maury Chaykin just died?" Richard asked. The subject was death, guys who'd died before their time. My friend, poet/publisher Richard Olafson, and I had been bemoaning the massive budget cuts to the arts and various NGOs in BC, the loss of so many good literary presses, the precarious position of so many others, and had somehow gotten onto the dead guys theme after discussing what we'd each been reading this summer. The subject of Paul Quarrington's passing, and his wonderful posthumous memoir, *Cigar Box Banjo*, had prompted his question.



Cigar Box Banjo: Notes on Music and Life
Paul Quarrington
Greystone Books
2010, 244 pages

"No way!" I replied. I'd been teaching Paul's *Whale Music* for years and loved Maury's portrayal of the anti-hero Des Howell in the film adaptation of the novel. It was just too weird that the two artists, each at the top of his game, should die so soon, the same year – nay months, not even a month, apart. Neither artist would see sixty.

The primary reasons for my Victoria visit had been my father's declining health and the news one of my old friends was dying of cancer. So there it was in the open: smoking and obesity, a pair of scythes slicing down the summer wheat.

I have to admit, I was surprised by my friend Gary's upbeat mood (He's only a year older than Paul was at 58). I was pleasantly surprised to find my Dad in better shape than I'd envisioned (He's 85). I was delighted to find so much sanguine wisdom and rollicking good humour in Paul's book.

So what is it: memes metastasize too? Gary had put a finger on the situation: you're devastated when you hear the news, go into a depression, then rebound when you realize how little time you have for any reckoning, any settling of accounts. There had been no A.A. step list or religious conversion, though Gary had found himself reading the Bible, and more books besides, and Paul had recently gone back to his first love of playing and gigging with a cross-genre band, ironically called *Porkbelly Futures*.

Porkbelly Futures

There had been no Lazarus hocus pocus and allakazzam; you went on with the business of getting on with your life, though time had become more precious and you tended to want to fill it up hovering the air for any rose scent you could find. And, with all the snuffling of the earth, you turn up a lot of truffles.

So it is with Paul's book. No pissing and moanin', though we get the requisite scene of the spiritual passage to a rugged coastline, the chat of self and soul, the sadness, the small epiphanies. But Death isn't some melodramatic character with black cowl and scythe, waiting in the wings, and he's certainly never given centre stage, let

Paul Quarrington

alone a soft white spot to juggle skulls.

Indeed, while the first draft would been given slab honours, the final book came out as a hybrid memoir of spiritual meditation and pragmatic from-the-road chat about the importance of family and friends, and the secrets of making it – better yet, making it your own, on your own terms — in the music biz.

On this last subject, Paul knows a great deal. Before his life as one of Canada's finest novelists, he played bass for *Joe Hall and The Continental Drift*, had a local hit or two, gigged religiously, and he'd recently begun touring and recording as front man, vocalist and rhythm guitarist with a new roots rock band *Porkbelly Futures.* (The book contains a bonus enhanced CD of three of Paul's most recent songs, and two videos, and I noticed in my local HMV recently that a full-length disc under his name has also just been released.)

We might have expected a late book on the subject of the writing craft – Paul was an accomplished novelist, non-fiction writer, screenwriter, filmmaker, and songwriter, and made his living as an exemplary writer, after all. Still, the man was a multitasker, and, indeed, could be said to have lived three lives in three media – books, film, and song, so this close-up memoir of learning the chords and changes, learning to improvise up the neck of a Les Paul or Fender Stratocaster or acoustic nylon string classical guitar, traces the distance between all craft and art, and offers answers to many questions regarding the development of an individual voice, and living an authentic life as an artist in any medium. I'm not selling the musical advice short either: there is plenty here for the nuts-and-bolts crowd who want to know what chords and what changes.

You'll want to pass this book along to anyone facing the grim reaper, for sure: you'll have them bolt upright, laughing themselves silly in bed, but you'll want to recommend it to lovers of his fiction and previous fishing memoir as well. It's about living life to the fullest, after all, not about raging at the dying of any light. It's still about catching evanescent fish. Page for page, we're looking at vintage Quarrington too: this is no box of licorice all-sorts, or final under-the-bed cardboard box of snap-shot gleanings; no cobbled together death haiku or mumbled set of hosed-off homilies; this is the full-meal deal, and Paul went out just as he'd always lived. Maybe not burning the candles at both ends the way he had in his younger days of drinking, smoking, womanizing, when he certainly didn't do body and soul any favours perhaps, but clear-eyed, optimistic, realistic, in-the-moment, kind, and generous.

He's given us all a seasoned gift here.

Richard Stevenson teaches and lives in Lethbridge, AB. His most recent book is **Windfall Apples** ***(Athabasca University Press, 2010). Ekstasis Editions has just accepted his collection of haiku and senryu for teens,*** **Casting Out Nines: Tart Pops for Teens.**

Walt Whitman's Secret

Al MacLachlan

It has been some time since I've thought much about Walt Whitman. I had read him around the same time as I did Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, and had unwittingly lumped him in with Emerson's pastoral spiritual philosophy, which *Leaves of Grass,* Whitman's famous anthology of poems, at first glance seems to belong to.

Walt Whitman's Secret
George Fetherling
Random House of Canada

And to some degree it does, as Emerson influenced both Whitman and Thoreau. Yet Whitman was not the sort of man who could tolerate the quietude and solitude of country life for very long, and spent most of his life living in towns and cities. Nor was the majority of his poetry to do with nature and the pastoral experience.

George Fetherling's new novel, *Walt Whitman's Secret* is "fiction that exploits some conventions of non-fiction." Fetherling uses the real characters, freely takes dialogue from Horace Trauble's non-fiction *With Walt Whitman in Camden,* and invents other scenes and situations in turn making it difficult to tell which is true and what imaginary. Providentially, it revolves very much around Whitman's secret. But which secret is that?

The secret (and gossip) back then was that he suffered from inversionism, as homosexuality was often called. He was the first of many brilliant men of similar inclination who transformed American literature and theatre. At the time of my early readings of Whitman's work 30 years ago I don't recall detecting any homoeroticism in those poems I read. Mind you, I had not read 'Calamus' or the other erotic offerings. It was only later that I heard the rumours. Regardless, his poetry, while sensual, earthy and liberating, transcends such sensationalism, and is important for its revolutionary realism, playfulness, and the free verse that greatly influenced poetry throughout the English-speaking world. Indeed, throughout the world.

Fetherling, a fine non-fiction writer too, does excellent work presenting a portrait of the poet and times and in dropping subtle hints of various secrets. For someone not familiar with Whitman's life, such as myself, this gives mystery to some fairly mundane aspects of the great poet's life, which towards his end is disheartening. It seems some of his (straight) friends suspect his sexuality, and the narrator is at times desperate to get quotable confirmation. As to the other secret that has Whitman as a possible accomplice to Lincoln's assassination, the reader will have to wait until very close to both the demise of the poet and the denouement of the novel.

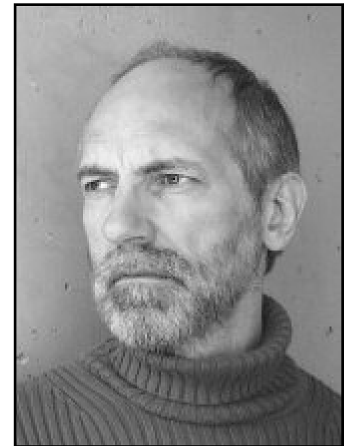
Often it is historical novels or independent history books where we find out the real truths of our past. The American Revolution had less to do with tea or taxes, than with land. King George III's Royal Proclamation in 1763 that created a boundary on further expansion into Indian lands didn't sit well with real estate speculators like George Washington who had dibs on some of that territory.

And the American Civil War began not to free the slaves, but to stop the southern states seceding. It was a senseless war that has left the USA with an internal turmoil that exists to this day. A war that found Whitman nursing the wounded and dying, and possibly thinking similar thoughts.

But he was a northerner who apparently loved Lincoln, unlike a lot of Americans south *and* north of the Mason-Dixon line, and would be an unlikely candidate to be involved in the plot to kidnap or assassinate the president. However, there is another leading character, Pete Doyle, an Irish American who fought with the South and, according to Fetherling and other sources, was the love of Whitman's life. Doyle though is hardly the intellectual peer of Walt, and the book's narrator, Horace Trauble, is intrigued that many of Whitman's alleged loves were with regular working-men, not the least bit drawn to poetry or the arts.

Walt Whitman's Secret is primarily set during the period of Whitman's life where he was facing death. Trauble, who was one of Walt's prime care-givers and wrote about those times, is trying to find out about his mentor's earlier life, particularly during the Civil War where Whitman worked in hospitals attending to the injured and often shattered soldiers.

I had heard that sycophants surrounded Whitman during the later period of his life, and Traubel, a man young enough to have been Walt's grandson, initially appears to be one of them. I have known several celebrated people in their later years, and like Traubel I wish I had known them when they were younger. So I wondered why Fetherling took this period of Whitman's life to focus on. Although Whitman faces death with extreme courage, this was not his finest hour. I know from experience it is often depressing caring for the frail elderly, and this certainly comes across in the novel. I presume Fetherling found this the appropriate era for dramatic purposes, because poor Walt is the antithesis of the virile, enthusiastic lover of the universe that comes across so forcefully in his poetry. Although this story is as much about the socialist Horace Traubel, who was responsible for keeping Whitman's work in the public eye for the next few decades, so I imagine that would be the central reason for the time-line.



George Fetherling

I did not know that Walt was acquainted with the Wilkes family. One of its members being the infamous John Wilkes Booth. But of course, why wouldn't they have been acquaintances, if not friends? Booth was a famous actor, Whitman renowned as an essayist, journalist and poet. In a small city like Washington, population 130,000 in 1870, they'd have known each other, and they had many friends in common. Including Pete Doyle.

Fetherling's style throughout the novel is flawless. His vocabulary, tone and even the capitalization of letters common at that time place the reader back in this literary period. It's a delight to read, although admittedly sentences such as, "I was dragooned by the distaff side into attending a Presbyterian service in the town, a tidy and resolutely undemonstrative place…" require some attention, particularly as Traubel was a Jew.

And then there is the Canadian angle. Whitman was a great admirer of southern Ontario's natural beauty (this was when it still had some forests), although he couldn't understand why the people remained subservient to Britain's king. Dr Bucke, who was a long-time friend and collector of the poet's books, makes many appearances, and as a doctor who runs a lunatic asylum enlightens Trauble of Whitman's Uranian (another antique word for gay) tendencies, although Bucke prefers to call it 'anomalous love'.

The fact is in those days it was a subject rarely talked about at all, even though in most countries it was a capital offense. The often-furtive process that Traubel uses to investigate such information about his icon concurs with this general inhibition of the times.

And the other Canadian of note here is the author himself who adds some external views of 19th century America from a Canadian perspective. That Canadians secretly supported the South is surprising, for example, as we had abolished slavery decades earlier. Robert E. Lee, however, received a hero's welcome in Montreal after the war, and many Canadians lent moral, if not financial support to the South. Even back then we were very cautious of the ambitions and moods of the States (especially the northern expansionist inclinations) and would have preferred a United States divided, as would the rest of the world today perhaps.

But let us get back to the secret. A number of people were imprisoned and some executed for being accomplices to Lincoln's assassination. There is no doubt it was Booth who shot him, but why did he engage in so much deviousness before what was to be the kidnapping of the president, which would later implicate so many others? Including Dr Mudd who attended to Booth's fractured ankle. Four people were hanged, including the first woman to be executed in the USA.

Had Whitman's role in the plot (if he had one), been exposed at the time he might have been imprisoned. He would surely have been ostracised and further impoverished than he already was. And I have to say from a personal viewpoint that it is the relative poverty that Walt Whitman, surely one of America's greatest poets, faces throughout the pages of this book that left me with some very bleak feelings. Especially as I see things have not changed much in that regard with today's writers and artists who scrape by most of their lives to be left in virtual poverty in their retirement.

In Fetherling's tale Walt's friends make his last days of agony a little more comfortable, both physically and psychologically, for it is obvious that they care for, as well as admire the Good Gray Poet. And that is perhaps all anyone can ask.

Al Maclachlan has a forthcoming novel from Ekstasis Edidtions called* Murmurs of the Dead.** ***He lives in Nanaimo, B.C .

Michael McClure in Seattle

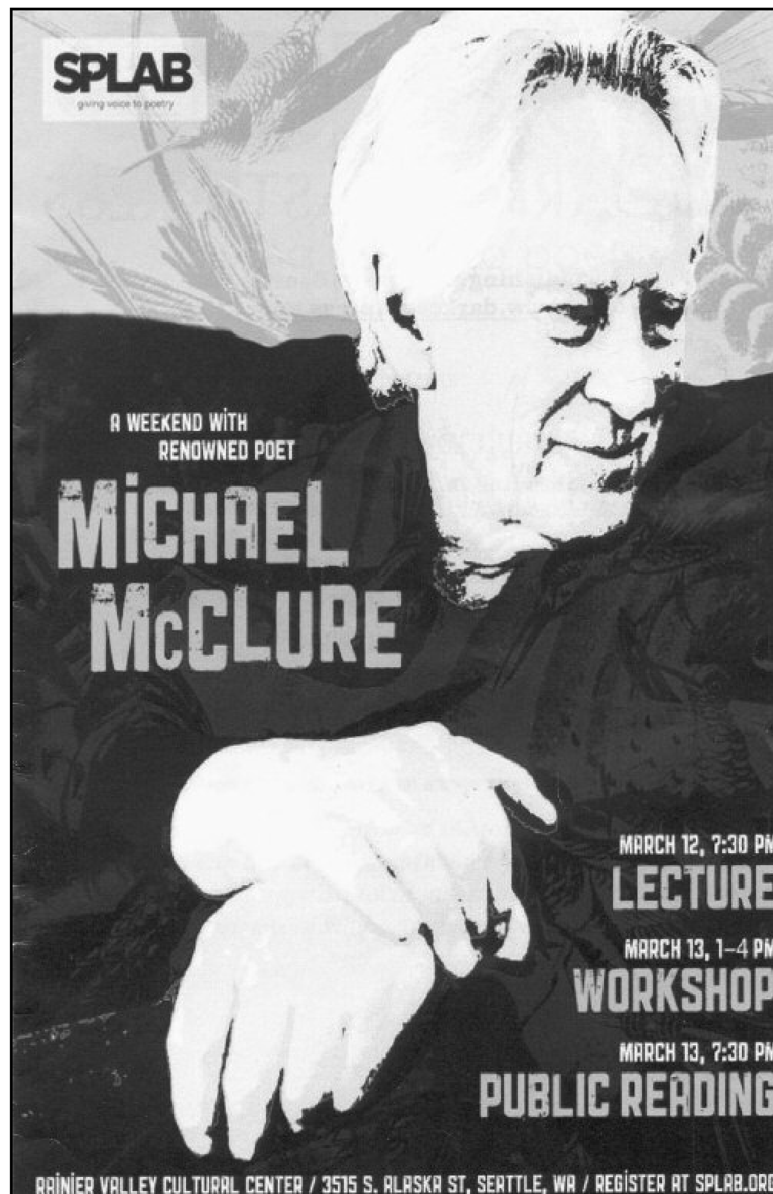
Carol Ann Sokoloff

"Michael McClure is giving a poetry workshop in Seattle," Richard mentioned casually one spring day. We both agreed we'd like to go. In a way it was Michael McClure that had brought us together. R. had been carrying some McClure poetry the day we first connected and I had just met the poet a few weeks before. A former housemate, Sheri-D. Wilson, had been in a production of his play, *Josephine the Mouse Singer.* Newly reading Kerouac and the Beats, I had begged an invitation to an event the poet/playwright was attending. For me it was a memorable meeting. I remember a brief conversation on writing we shared, and somehow feeling that my life had been changed. When I mentioned it to R. that first day, he told me about his own experiences with McClure. They too had shared a conversation he would never forget.

Twenty-four years and two grown kids later, we planned a romantic weekend away to re-connect with this figure who had inspired us both so deeply. Taking the scenic route down the Olympic Peninsula to downtown Seattle, we arrived at the Mayflower Park – my favourite kind of small hotel. There we settled in for a wonderful weekend of words (and music too, as Seattle has one of the best jazz scenes on the planet.) Seattle poet Paul Nelson had organized a well-thought out workshop schedule, with all events taking place at the Rainier Valley Cultural Centre in a very hip South Seattle neighbourhood a tourist might never discover. The weekend started with a lecture Friday night.

Michael McClure had grown a little older, as we all had, in the quarter-century since the last meeting, but the voice hadn't changed nor the magical gleam in his eyes – the almost leprechaun-like sense of wonder he exudes. That Friday evening he spoke of some sources of inspiration for his own writing: Blake, Lorca, Shelley, Lawrence, Dickenson and Keats. I had the feeling many in the audience were surprised when this Beat Generation icon concluded with a Middle English rendition of the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales.* A former Chaucerian, I was delighted.

Saturday afternoon we re-assembled, ready to work. McClure suggested we start by each reading a short poem he'd asked us to bring – a great way to create instant rapport. He then spoke of a British study years ago in which children were asked to name the twelve loveliest things. He read their responses which were imaginative and fresh, evoking clear sensory experience ("water running into a bath" and "the smell of cut grass.") McClure suggested we imitate those children and exercise the imagination to find concrete images which transfer a solid and physical experience of the sense of taste, touch, sound, smell and vision. We also penned our 'twelve favourite things.'



Poster for the lecture and workshop weekend with Michael McClure in Seattle in March, 2010

"This is a workshop on imagination and inspiration," McClure explained. "We will not write a poem or come away with a trophy poem. We are not going there. Our goal is not to make a poem, but to visit an experiential process and visit insights in the language, art and poetry." Instead of writing a poem McClure invited us to engage in the process of creating a 'word sculpture' – a sculpture of sights, sounds and senses. This 'word sculpture,' McClure insisted, would not be a poem but, "an instrument to gain insight into the art of poetry."

The poet asked us to suspend our own habitual judgements and also our judgements of others. Then he began to demonstrate the process of creating this word sculpture – one he called "Tyger." Starting with the first two lines of Blake's Tyger ("Tyger, tyger burning bright, in the forests of the night") McClure began the process of assembling other random lines which similarly evoked "complex or simple images that are complete in themselves." I did not take down the ones he came up with, although I remember the first was about rats munching on tin foil or something equally bizarre (much too clear an image for my comfort.) After inventing half a dozen on the spot, McClure paused, mimicking a temporary block. This was an opportunity to share Jack Kerouac's "alluvial metaphor" as a means of overcoming creative blocks. If I understood correctly, the alluvial metaphor considers text as a kind of sediment collecting on a mountain, carried from the summit by gravity, water and wind. The writer, when stuck, goes back to the top of the mountain (or the start of the poem) and simply reads the lines that have collected, repeating as often as necessary. I enjoyed learning Kerouac's metaphor for that most natural writing process.

After McClure had completed and written down some dozen succinct images (a kind of a sonnet beginning with the two lines from Blake), it was our turn. There was nothing difficult about the task. We weren't writing a poem but simply noting random images and sensory observations. There were no judgements or expectations as we read them out to each other. It was refreshing to be in a room full of writers we hadn't met or heard before, and to hear the variety of images the group was able to conjure.

Next McClure suggested we take a new approach, one he called "Spyder." Designed to help uncover "unintended structures – partly in language, partly in consciousness," the Spyder exercise consisted of taking the previous fourteen lines, re-writing them and then continuing by putting them in the reverse order. Now we were on to something interesting! The word sculpture "Spyder" began and ended with the first two lines from Blake's Tyger. In between the random images began to take on a new life. My own lines became much more meaningful and strangely sequential when read in reverse. It did seem like McClure's leprechaun magic was at work, but the poet explained how the writing of disjointed thoughts can open the imagination and allow words that "were never meant to be said but need to be said" to emerge. It was a fascinating exercise and affirmed McClure's assertion that the word sculpture can be "an instrument to gain windows into the art of poetry."

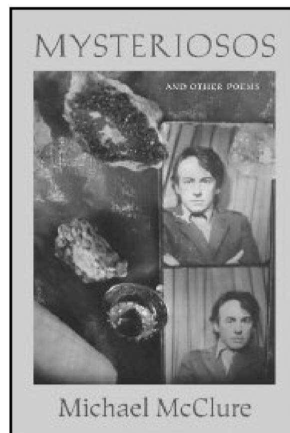
That evening Michael McClure gave an extraordinary reading, both from his newest volume *Mysteriosos and Other Poems*, the first copy of which he had seen that very afternoon, as well as from previous works. As someone who has not always fully understood his poems when printed on the page, often in upper case and peppered with stars, I began to catch the inflections of voice those devices were meant to represent.

The weekend with Michael McClure was profound in many ways. I gained new insight into the long roots of Beat poetry, stretching back to the Romantics, Blake and Chaucer, as well as new tools for freeing the imagination, overcoming blocks and creating fresh pathways for unexpected revelations. And I bathed in the words of one of the great artists of language over the past half decade whose sense of wonder vibrates through the body of his work, infusing it with a youthful spirit to balance a mature poet's mastery of craft.

Carol Ann Sokoloff is a Victoria, BC author, poet, jazz vocalist and songwriter. Her debut jazz CD* Let Go! *will be released in December, featuring original songs in the style of jazz standards.

The Meat Lab of Michael McClure: Mysteriosos and Other Poems

Paul Nelson



Mysteriosos and Other Poems
Michael McClure
New Directions, 2010
$15.95 US, $20.00 CAN

He's said it before, *I am the abstract alchemist of flesh made real*[1] and while that may have seen by some as mere puffery, it turns out to be either prophecy or intention, or both. One of the least known Beat Poets shows at 77 he's not done with these experiments in consciousness others call *poems.*

Mysteriosos and Other Poems is the latest book from Michael McClure and the notion of poetic praxis as alchemical laboratory is accurate for what he's done since the mid-1950s. As these poems are the fruits of fifty-five years of practice and as McClure's projective method is an "experiment in consciousness" each time he sets pen to paper or fingertips to keyboard to compose poetry, a close look at the work rewards the reader handsomely. It is a window to the possible, so open is his approach to composition.

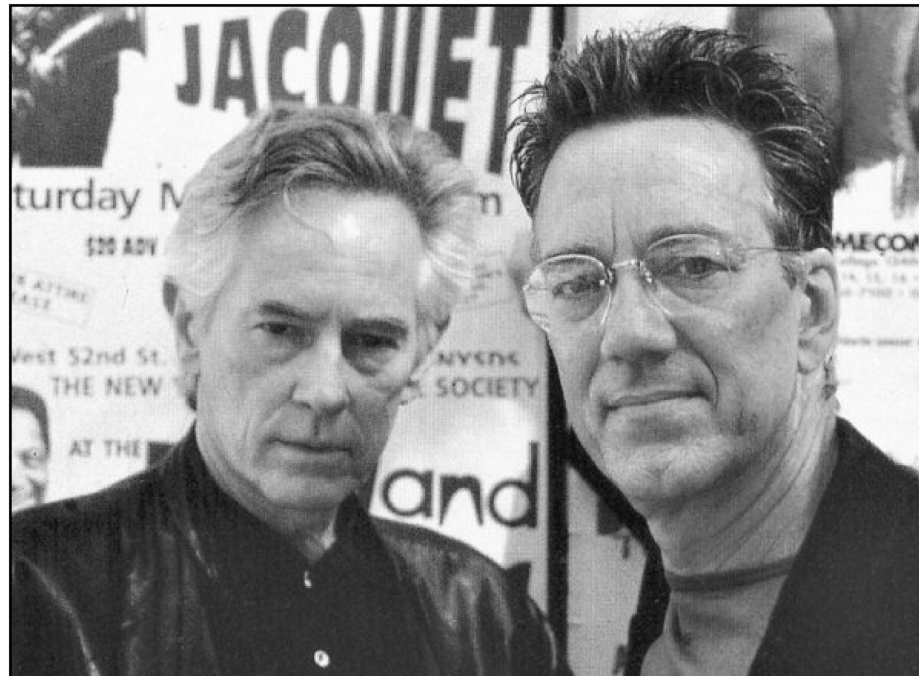
It only takes three sentences of the book for McClure to get to the heart of the greatest issue of our time, *our unending war against nature* he calls it (ix). On several occasions McClure said he considered the Beat Generation "the literary wing of the environmental movement."[2] Anyone who has read Gary Snyder's poetry or essays, or McClure's more environmentally-focused poems, like *For the Death of 100 Whales* (read at the legendary Six Gallery reading), or his line, *I am a Mammal Patriot*[3], begins to get a sense of whose side McClure is on. And as we begin as a society to realize that this declaration of McClure's of the unending war on nature is not a metaphor, the collateral damage will already have been quite severe. Yet, my wildlife biologist friend says "Mother Earth bats last." Nature is already responding and will hit mechanistic society where it hurts the most, in the pocketbook. One early tally of the economic costs of the recent Icelandic volcano eruption stands at £1.8 Million due to lost airplane revenues alone[4]. This is only one of the latest fronts of nature's defense. Haitian, Chilean and Chinese earthquakes, May Vermont snow, relentless summer forest fires, New England floods and other weather system disruptions are only the first sorties.

And it only takes McClure a second paragraph of the introduction before he's back to the theme of alchemy, again. Problem (love of destruction through war) and solution (alchemical transcendence) in six sentences and the poetry has yet to begin! Remember, McClure is no reductionist. Whereas alchemy – as seen through the dominant western world view – is only a crude precursor to modern chemistry, for McClure, as with other genuine alchemists, it's about individual transformation. Never mind for the moment that peace in the war against nature requires millions of these individual transformations. McClure's been after his for a while and opens a window for yours. This is the crux of his method and it is an antidote to mechanism.

Albertus Magnus (1193 – 1280) listed the qualities that the genuine alchemist must possess:

> *First: He should be discreet and silent, revealing to no one the result of his operations.*
> *Second: He should reside in an isolated house in an isolated position.*
> *Third: He should choose his days and hours for labor with discretion.*
> *Fourth: He should have patience, diligence and perseverance.*
> *Fifth: He should perform according to fixed rules.*
> *Sixth: He should only uses vessels of glass and glazed earthenware.*
> *Seventh: He should be sufficiently rich to bear the expenses of his art.*
> *Eighth: He should avoid having anything to do with princes and noblemen (14).*

Regarding the first of these qualities, discretion, McClure has been open about his process but has only given us hints of his struggles along the way, "Now I understand the sexual addiction/ of my young manhood/ was a crucifixion-/ glittering and lovely/ as/ an ostrich boa and smashed mirrors // seen on acid (8). What ports and what storms, we never exactly get to find out.



Michael McClure with frequent collaborator Ray Manzarek

These lines from his 1995 poem *Dolphin Skull* are critical, because McClure has gone back to them time and time again. He does in this volume at the very beginning of *Dear Being,* the most luminous jewel in this shimmering book of poems. From that notion of sexual addiction, he retains his humor, going on to describe a photo booth picture of himself "looking up into the science fiction in his forehead" (69). That stanza, the first of thirty-seven, at once announces his dedication to the catalyst for his late life transformation (his partner Amy Evans McClure) and the personal mythology that led him to her. And so we do not get confused regarding this, he puts it in a facet of his unique typography, capital letters. (No, he was doing this long before the World Wide Web was created and email was popular.) He tells us he is "fully alert: JUST AS I ALWAYS AM, / A SUICIDAL CHILD IN LOVE WITH EXPERIENCE / RISKING ALL ONLY TO BE WITH YOU (69). Sure, the love for his late life partner is evident. And, as the person who recommended, even urged that he develop a Zen meditation practice, she deserves respect at very least. But the depth of feeling transferred from McClure to the reader via this long tribute to Amy Evans McClure gives you a sense of just how important she has been in helping him channel that natural mammal energy he'd been blessed with and which, at age 77, he must apportion wisely.

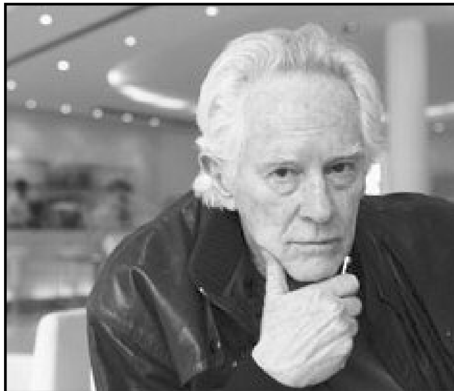
Regarding the eighth of the alchemist's qualities, McClure is in no danger. Poets have long been persecuted for their propensity for speaking truth to power. And the closest we have to noblemen in USAmerica is politicians, which should explain a good deal of the problems emanating from North America. But McClure makes sure the point comes across as clearly as possible, while still remaining poetry, as in the poem *Madame Secretary* in which he wonders, again in caps " – WHAT MIRACLES OF FIREARMS AND MACHETES/ ALLOW CHILDREN TO MORPH/ INTO VEIN-BURSTING, BULGE-CHESTED HEROES / PUTTING BARE FEET/ ON LAND MINES (26)?

This is not a case of piling on to the Bush Administration's horrors, as McClure lets us know further in the poem that it was Clinton's Secretary of State that he refers to as "The Secretary of Deceit" whose face leaves him awed "as it leans out,/ falling from the glass-fronted box,/ and crashes with a squeak/ on the floor/ spreading a scarlet pool. // grahhr. This is his answer. An anger so intense it can only end in a word from his own Beast Language, which came to him in an epiphanic experience in the early 60's, and which he has resurrected in the 90s specifically for occasions like this. In fact, the *Grahhrs* are a whole section of the book. *War Poems* he calls them, but they are pleas for peace in a world that has regressed since the language was discovered inside himself as he tried to articulate the feelings he felt about the U.S. involvement in Vietnam half a century ago. We can count out the USAmerican princes and noblemen from rallying to McClure's cause anytime soon.

The alchemist's fifth quality calls for fixed rules. McClure's method is the most exacting of all possible poetry forms. He has written,

> *to write spontaneously does not mean to write carelessly or without thought and deep experience. In fact, there must be a vision and a poetics that are alive and conscious… I do not know of a more adventurous gesture than to write spontaneously* (xv).

Sometimes there are moments a mind more focused on product than process would reconsider after the act, such as when he rhymes *reason* with *lesion* in the long poem *Double Moire for Francis Crick.* One could pick out one or two more such reaches, but they are more than forgivable when contrasted by the depth of the success of this adventurous gesture. McClure might liken them to the extra drips of paint Jackson Pollock might have left on a canvas once he knew the painting was complete. Alas, perfection has evaded him, but he came close.



Michael McClure

Like any brilliant art, *Mysteriosos* rewards repeated readings, even to the author himself who gets more meaning unveiled the deeper he prehends each poem long after the initial act of composition. After each *occasion of experience* the poem is in McClure's hands to quote Alfred North Whitehead. The 20th century philosopher known for his "Theory of Organism" is a huge source for McClure and for Charles Olson, whose poetics McClure furthers like no one else. But that McClure continues to mine 1995's *Dolphin Skull* for inspiration illustrates the poem's continued slow blossoming of meaning.

It also illustrates the remarkable nature of the serial poem, which got its start on the West Coast of North America[5] with such poets as Jack Spicer, Robert Duncan, Robin Blaser, and continues with later West Coast poets like Canadians George Bowering and Fred Wah and Nathaniel Mackey, in his brilliant twin-sided series *Mu* and *Song of the Andomboulou.* Remarkable because for the poet composing in this organic manner, to develop the intuition to recognize when a poem is availing itself and to create the space for the poem to come into being, is a huge accomplishment, especially to create something of this caliber. To trust that the poem has an intelligence of its own and to develop a praxis that allows one to track it, that is a remarkable achievement as well. But to also understand when *a specific flavor* of that poem is being revealed, this gives you a sense of the depth of McClure's gesture in continuing this yet untitled serial poem that started with *Dolphin Skull.* His work rewards the seeker; the one who senses that there is more to life than the reductionist jive we've been handed for a long time now and which every advertisement reinforces in the mind of the gullible. It's a message spread by mammals with an anthropocentric ethos so pernicious they will settle for nothing less than the complete annihilation of the planet. But the alchemist in McClure gives us hope that we can take his advice and seek a middle way,

> *Put out the fires in the eye*
> *there is another style besides hatred and heat.*
> *Let the soul go, build a pliant strong heart* (111).

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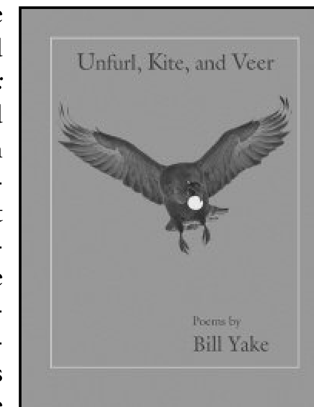
[1] From the poem "For Jim Morrison", performed in the DVD *The Third Mind*, 1999.
[2] From a May 30, 2003 interview published on the UC Berkeley website, http://berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2003/05/30_beats.shtml
[3] Stated several times in Antechaber and Other Poems
[4] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8629623.stm
[5] Certainly there are parallels in other art forms, such as in Monet's Rouen Cathedral series.

Paul Nelson is a poet, teacher, broadcaster and founder of the non-profit Global Voices Radio. A professional broadcaster, he has interviewed hundreds of authors, poets, activists and whole-system theorists for a syndicated public affairs radio program.

Unfurl, Kite, and Veer

Howard McCord

Bill Yake continues in *Unfurl, Kite and Veer* the intense focus and attention both to nature and language that he showed in *This Old Riddle: Cormorants and Rain* (also beautifully designed and produced by Radiolarian Press). He is a naturalist with a sharp, educated eye at home in wetland, desert, jungle, forests, mountains, and the ocean itself. He is a poet with a command of all the species – significant differences in sounds, rhythms, and sense required to create images flowing in language like creatures to their nesting places. As fractals erupt from a point and the molecules of crystals fall into their specific order, Yake's poems hit and glow with their necessity. "Yes," the reader says, "that's exactly right." As plain as "pup sea-lions…their whiskers—quill-like and gleaming." (p.45)



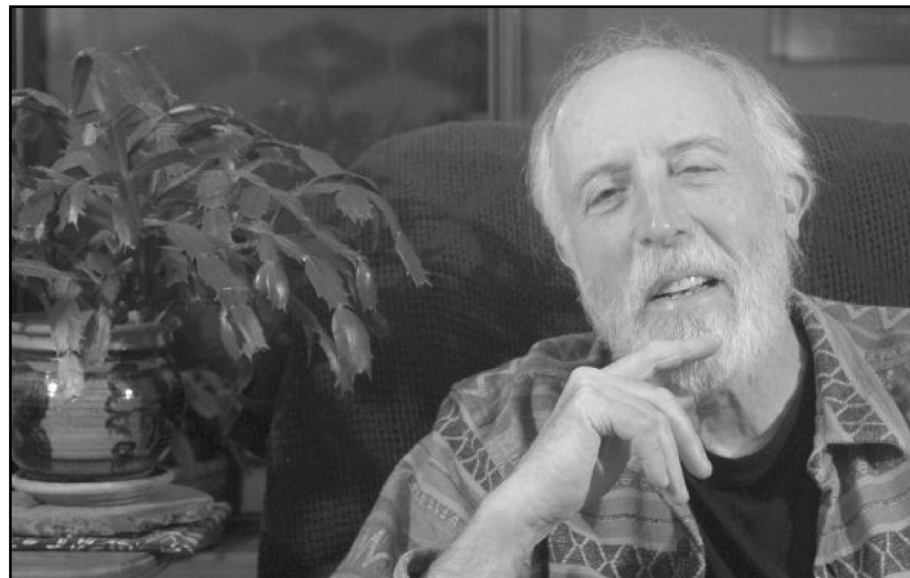
Unfurl, Kite, and Veer
Bill Yake
Radiolarian Press, 2010

Or "fire…licked the dry and jointed grasses up" (p.28) – simple observations made powerful by precise word-choice.

"The Poet, In And Out Of Kilter" takes the sounds of a quiet house and turns them into a symphony of cosmic rustling, demanding a response. What is it, really, out there that impinges upon our senses?

We will never know, but respond we must. Where are we in the scales of size and distance? Closer to dust motes than the nearest stars, certainly. These are the mysteries sung by that man in San Blas (p.49) who sat facing the wall in the dark, singing to the sea.

Whether he is driving across central Washington, walking a trail in the coastal forests, reading Fenollosa, or listening to a tale in the New Guinea Highlands, Bill Yake is tuned to the situation, absorbing all the fine detail, and linking co-ordinates in his memory. He lets the language mesh and move in his mind, and when he shows the words to you, you are there too, and seeing, hearing, knowing.



Bill Yake

There is considerable conceptual brilliance in the book that comes from Yake's scientific background. Such small notes as "Seasons are poems written on Moebius strips" (p. 93) and "The Long Kiss of Logarithmic Decay" (p. 94) cheer me, raised in days of slide rules and explanations echoing Napier's own. It is clear that all life fascinates Yake, and all the stuff upon which life builds and in which it exists.

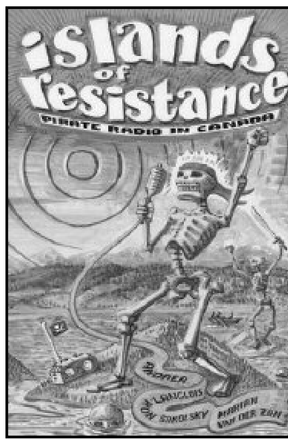
Every ongoing process is beautiful: birth, growth, decay, and death have each their season and celebration. And how we know these is more beautiful yet. This is Bill Yake's subject.

Howard McCord's 419 page **Complete Poems** *was published in 2002. The author of three dozen books and chapbooks, he has given readings from his works at more than two hundred universities. A climber for nearly sixty years, he continues to travel the backcountry of the west in search of interesting rock.*

Islands of Resistance: Pirate Radio in Canada

Paul Falardeau

As someone involved as a programmer and DJ in university campus radio, I was excited and curious on seeing *Islands of Resistance: Pirate Radio in Canada*. For the past few years I've been involved in the creation of a station that, hopefully, fulfills the mission of broadcasting music and ideas that are key to the counter-culture of the area, as well as providing a place for students and staff to hear great music, new and old.



Islands of Resistance:
Pirate Radio in Canada
Andrea Langlois et al.
New Star Books
2010, pp. 245

Islands of Resistance takes that vision a step further. The book focuses largely on underground and illegal radio stations and broadcasts, spotlighting do-it-yourself tactics and techniques. Collectively known as pirate radio, these stations, found all across Canada, are created as means to broadcast outside the restrictions set by the Canadian, and often American, government.

The book is a collection of essays by notables of the trade, including Ron Sakolsky, Martin van der Zon and Andrea Langouis. Stephen Dunifer writes the first essay, entitled "Latitudes of Rebellion," a history of pirate radio, giving the book international context. From offshore radio stations in England, broadcasting banned rock and roll from boats in the sixties to revolutionary transmissions in El Salvador; pirate radio has had important roles to play across the last century.

From here, there are a series of largely personal essays, which reflect the experiences of some of the pioneers of pirate radio in Canada. Some are quite fact-heavy and come across as a little dry, but most are easy to read, informative and thought-provoking. There is also a mini "docudrama" and a short checklist of radical radio resources for interested future-pirates.

Sheila Nopper's piece "Freedom Soundz" is a particularly engaging piece that neatly highlights the need for pirate radio outside of the officially sanctioned college and underground stations. Nopper expresses this need by tracing her own path from Toronto's CIUT to pirate station, Tree Frog Radio.

Andrea Langlois

Islands of Resistance does a neat job of picking writers and topics from across the nation (the book includes writers from Barierre Lake and Nanaimo to Quebec City. Similarly it organizes them into a progression from essays on history, to need, to practices of pirate radio.

There is an overall theme of resistance, and pirate imagery abounds. For various reasons pirate radio operators have chosen to work outside of the established grid. These can include wanting to play music that is otherwise banned or restricted by the CRTC, providing commentary on issues not normally allowed on commercial radio, and the ability to present artistic endeavours that would otherwise not be broadcast.

The one issue with the book is that nothing is included on how these underground broadcasters might work together with corporate, college and public radio stations across the country. It would seem a vital component to the collection to ask the question of how underground radio can change the current dominant system, instead of just working against it, even if it is for a good cause.

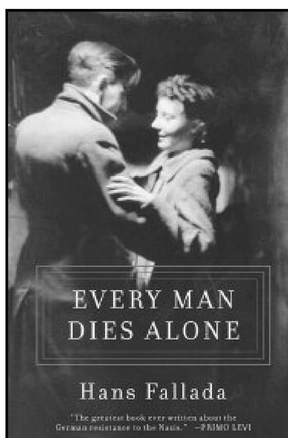
In this sense, *Islands of Resistance* is a valuable knowledge transmission from the people who have fought the system to those carrying on the battle, a must read for anyone interested in any sort of radio broadcast and a wake-up call to listeners tired of overplayed cash cows and commercials. The next step might be to try and integrate this revolutionary spirit into the mainstream, but it is comforting to know that we still have independent voices in our nation.

Paul Falardeau studies English and Biology at UFV, where he is president of Students for Sustainability. He lives in Aldergrove, writes on music and culture for The Cascade in Abbotsford, and is a programmer and DJ for CIVL radio.

We Didn't Know

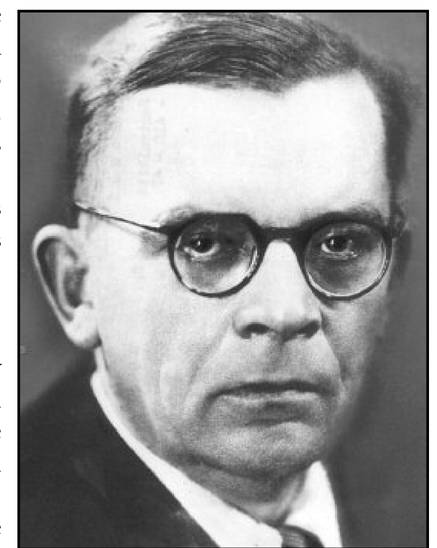
James Edward Reid

How did it happen? How did Germans who were only following Hitler's orders murder six million Jews? Why did good Germans collude with the Nazis? Or just look away in the interests of peace, order, and government? Our answers are inadequate. In *Every Man Dies Alone*, Hans Fallada's answers are compelling. Set in wartime Berlin in 1941, his novel is based on an actual Gestapo file detailing the investigation and arrest of two truly good Germans, Otto and Elise Hampel. Otto Hampel wrote postcard attacks on Hitler, and surreptitiously placed them around the city, while his wife watched to make sure he was not observed. Excerpts from the file and the postcards, are included in the end matter of the book. The cover endpapers reprint the map of Berlin that the Gestapo used to hunt down the Hampels. The streets on the map are dotted with dozens of red flags that mark each postcard drop. Both the map and the file extracts are chilling.



Every Man Dies Alone
Hans Fallada
Melville House. 543 pp.
$32.00 Hardcover.
$19.95 Softcover.

The fictional counterpart of the Berliner Otto Hamperl is Otto Quangel, whose son has been killed in the war. One of the actual postcards reads in part, "The Fuhrer has murdered my son . . . The Fuhrer will murder your sons too, he will not stop until he has brought sorrow to every home in the world." Every postcard attack is unprecedented, and constitutes a crime against the state, punishable by torture and execution. As Quangel and his wife travel to different parts of Berlin, and place each card, his courage and the terrible danger it entails are palpable.



Hans Fallada

The everyday lives of several Berliners unfold, as the circulation of these postcards among them trigger violent searches and torture by incompetent Gestapo officers. Fallada's presentation of torture is particularly timely. Most Americans have looked away as the primary accomplishment of more than a decade of torture sanctioned by the American government has been to strengthen Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and other extremists. Fallada's grim description of Nazi torture matches contemporary accounts of extraordinary rendition to American black sites for torture. One discovery arising from these inhumane practices, is how deeply a man who agrees to torture someone, comes to enjoy his cruelty. The second is that torture, notwithstanding former vice president Cheney's ignorant assurances of success, almost never provides actionable intelligence. Most studies indicate that building trust does. In the Second World War, members of the British military found that sitting down and playing chess with captured German officers led these prisoners to reveal almost everything they knew.

Executed by the Gestapo, the Hampels did not live to hear the often told defence by citizens of wartime Germany that, "We didn't know what was happening." The citizens in Fallada's Berlin certainly knew what was happening, but his book is fiction. In

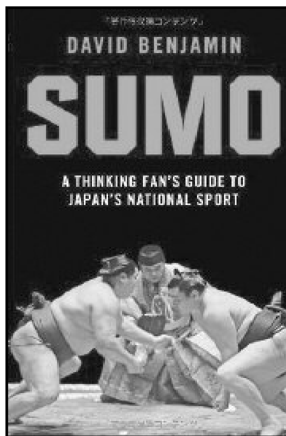
(*continued on page 30*)

Book News from Japan

Hillel Wright

What I like about David Benjamin's *Sumo* is that it lives up to its sub-title – especially the words "fan" and "sport".

This then, is a refreshingly irreverent, sometimes funny sports book, aimed at the sumo fan, and not another solemn dissertation about arcane Japanese traditions. Tuttle of course, being one of the two or three leading English language publishers of books about Japan, has produced its fair share of these, like Walter Long's *Sumo: a pocket guide*, which patiently lists and illustrates the 35 (of 84) most commonly employed acceptable holds and throws and provides a thumbnail history of sumo, as well as addresses of *Chanko-nabe* restaurants, where you can sample the one-pot super-meal the wrestlers gorge on, and even of the sumo *heya,* or training rooms, referred to in Japan as "stables", where you can watch the wrestlers in the flesh.



Sumo: a thinking fan's guide to Japan's national sport
David Benjamin
Tuttle Publishing
$20, 256pp

Flesh, of course, is what the fan sees a lot of in this sport. For in the Western mind, sport calls up the cut and toned body of the middle-weight boxer, the long-legged power and grace of the tennis champion – even the beef and bulk of the NFL linebacker – but surely not the flabby body of the obese teen ahead of you in the McDonald's queue or the herd of long-haul truckers attacking mounds of glistening hash browns to eat their way to their plates of ham, sausage, bacon & eggs, with a stack of pancakes on the side and blueberry pie for dessert.

Sure, physics plays a role in the typical sumo physique, just as Shinto plays a role in its many sensuous formal ceremonies which frame each tournament, indeed every match; but this book treats sumo as a game, not a high mass and fans as…well, fans, not tourists, scholars, or culture vultures.

Benjamin concentrates on the players. This means not only stats on the players, known in Japan as *rikishi* ("wrestlers"), but also their individual personalities, including hopes and fears, customs and superstitions, good habits and bad, along with most common throwing technique and favorite grip.

A favorite stylistic technique of Benjamin's is his penchant for giving individual *rikishi* nicknames, not referring to their fighting style (consider boxing's "Brown Bomber" or "Meridan Buzz Saw"), but rather to their body shape.Benjamin views them loosely as "blubberbutts" and "thoroughbreds", proposing his own tongue-in-cheek sub-categories: 1) Jocks; 2) Hippos; 3) Butterballs; 4) Cabdrivers. He also nominates his own candidates for each slot, personal nickname and all. Thus, *Yokozuna* (Grand Champion) Hokufoumi, a Jock, is rendered "the Jake LaMotta of Sumo"; 248kg (546lb) Yamamotoyama, obviously a Hippo, becomes "Twin Peaks"; rank & file scrapper Ozutsu, a Butterball, is dubbed "The Goldfish", while Kokkai, from the Republic of Georgia, the first European to reach sumo's top *(Makuuchi)* division and a Cabdriver is, quite naturally, "Ralph Kramden".

As a Canadian living in Japan for the past 13 years, I found *Sumo: the thinking fan's guide* a refreshing breeze to at least mitigate, if not fully counter the ill-wind blowing through the sumo community of late. Trouble began in September 2007 when news broke of the attempted cover-up of the beating death of a young sumo trainee in Nagoya. The accused stable-master Jun'ichi Yamamoto, was found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to six years in prison – but not without "severance pay" of a quarter-million dollars. It's reported that a undisclosed settlement was reached earlier this year.

Again in 2007, Mongolian-born *Yokozuna* Asashoryu was suspended for two tournaments – the first *Yokuzuna* ever – for falsely claiming injury and missing the annual summer tour to play in a charity soccer match in his native Mongolia. By contrast, Japanese-born wrestler Toki, who killed a pedestrian in a traffic accident in 2000 – no details released to the press – was given a one tournament suspension. Asashoryu, meanwhile, resigned from sumo after being arrested for street-fighting in Tokyo's international entertainment district of Roppongi.

In 2008, the fast-rising Russian-born Wakanoho, was arrested for possession of one cigarette containing marijuana, after his lost wallet containing the spliff was turned into police by a well-intentioned citizen. Result? A lifetime ban, no golden parachute.

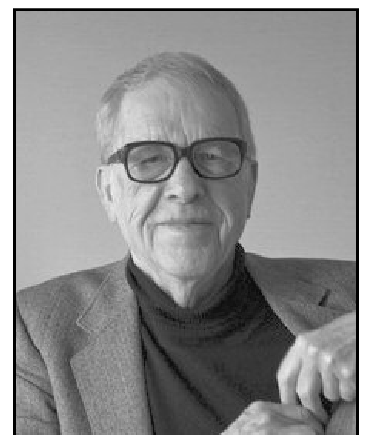
Sumo wrestlers Tosayutaka, right, and Toyohibiki fall to the ground during their bout in the grand summer tournament at Tokyo's Ryogoku Kokugikan sumo arena

Finally, this past May *Ozeki* (Champion) Kotomitsuki, was fired from sumo and banned for life for illegally betting on baseball and consorting with Yakuza gangsters

Expatriate sumo fans in Japan have been known to refer to sumo as "soap opera for men" and six times a year, 15 day Grand Sumo Tournaments are held as 40 of the sport's best wrestlers, personal problems and all, compete for the Emperor's Cup. As I write, the dust has settled following further tournament suspensions and demotions of several more suspected gamblers, and the *Aki Basho* (Fall Tournament) is in full swing at Tokyo's hard-to-pronounce Ryogoku Kokugikan, where on Day 7, September 18, Mongolian-born Hakuho, the 69th *Yokozuna*, won his 54th straight victory, passing the legendary Chiyonofuji to reach #2 on the list, behind Futabayama who won 69 in a row between 1936 and 1939 – kinda like Roger Maris going after Babe Ruth's 60 home run record in 1961.

To the fan who values the stats, the trivia, the day to day soap opera which sumo so faithfully provides, *Sumo: a thinking fan's guide to Japan's national sport* is a good commuter train read. It's one minor flaw is Benjamin's habit of bashing the "sumo nerds" as he calls them, the ex-pats who publish English language sumo fan magazines and do the English broadcasts and commentary on NHK, Japan's national TV network. Although Benjamin's mockery of their often patronizing textbook approach to sumo can be charming, his repeated barbs can be tedious. Fortunately, good humor overrides his occasional spleen.

It's nearly impossible for expatriate writers in Tokyo to avoid some connection with Donald Richie. For over 60 years and more than 40 books, both fiction and non-fiction, Richie has been an omnipresent phenomenon. He is the world's acknowledged expert on the films of Akira Kurosawa and Yasujiro Ozu, author of the definitive *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film* (2005), regular (until a recent illness) reviewer of Asian books for *The Japan Times*, as well as a short story writer and novelist



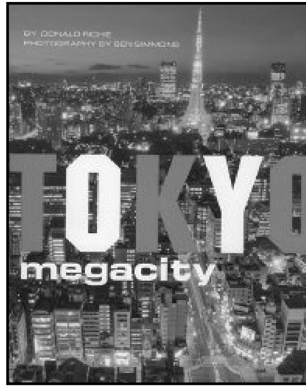
Donald Richie

It's in this latter capacity that my own connection with Mr. Richie comes in since Printed Matter Press, publisher of Richie's recent work and reisiues is also publisher of my novel *Border Town* and my book/CD *off beat: the Allen Ginsberg Interview.*

Besides writing extensively on Japanese film and subjects as diverse as yakuza tattoos, Zen Buddhism and geisha, Richie is perhaps best known outside Japan and the Japanophile world as author of the classic travel book *The Inland Sea* (1971) which, in my opinion and that of many other critics ranks among the best in the genre. Unfortunately, if per-

haps understandable and predictably, *Tokyo: Megacity* falls far short of this lofty standard.

To begin with, this is a coffee table book, and much of the text is a rehash of his earlier books. It avoids any hint of political or social controversy. Photographer Ben Simmons' contribution colorful, but generic, giving us the obligatory begging Buddhist monk with bamboo hat, tattooed gangster wearing loincloth (back view), frozen tunas at Tsukiji Fish Market. Most photos, however, are of architecture, so that the reader – or peruser – of the book might imagine Tokyo as a city of buildings, with a mere fringe population, rather than the world's largest metropolis with a population greater than that of Canada. Where, one is tempted to inquire, are all the people?



Tokyo: Megacity
Donald Richie
photographs by Ben Simmons
Tuttle Publishing
2010, $35, 176pp

Where are the typhoons of late summer & fall, the torrential downpours of the summer rainy season?

This book shows me none of the scenes I witness just about every day here. Where are the "blue mansions", those make-shift blue plastic tarp shelters of the homeless, that dominate the city's riverbanks and public parks; indeed, where are the hordes of homeless men, scouring the garbage heaps early mornings to salvage beer cans, their sole source of income? Where are the miniskirted high school girls, texting on their omnipresent cell phones while dangerously bicycling down crowded streets, earphones blasting J-Pop music, drowning out the warning horns of cars or bells of bikes? Where are the touts and pimps with their dyed blond, permed hair-dos and bad suits, handing out free packs of tissues in front of busy train stations—tissues whose packaging features ads enticing attractive girls into porn or prostitution? Where are the garish pachinko parlors and love hotels, more prevalent in modern Tokyo than shrines or temples?

These sights, so familiar to Tokyo residents on a daily basis, are totally absent. Tokyo in this book had been Bowdlerized; worse yet, even Disneyfied.

Hillel Wright is a frequent PRRB contributor from Japan.

FALLADA (*continued from page 28*)

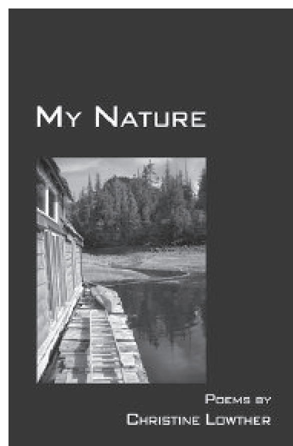
another book, Victor Klemperer's meticulously kept diary, there is assurance that everyone did know. Each of his entries in *I Will Bear Witness 1942-1945: A Diary of the Nazi Years*, proves knowledge of what was happening, and collusion with the Nazis. Fallada's fiction and Klemperer's true diary mirror each other in their presentation of the degradation along that slippery moral slope that descends from the lie of ignorance to collusion, collaboration, and finally to betrayal.

Just one of Klemperer's many entries describing the transfer of Jews to the death camps reads, "Three Berlin transports in a desperate condition have already passed through the city . . . They go to the Theresienstadt assembly camp, from where dispersal to Poland follows. Principally the widows and children of the men recently shot in Berlin or sent to concentration camps." (June 16, 1942, Tuesday afternoon entry). Only the deaf, dumb and blind could not have known what each Nazi *Aktion* meant. Discovery by the Gestapo of Klemperer's courageous diary, which eventually comprised 500 pages, could have led to his execution.

Each page of *Every Man Dies Alone* is marked by the petty viciousness of the Germans who knew what was happening, and volunteered to betray the innocent in order to inveigle themselves into the embrace of the Nazis,. There are other horrors, but in its stretches of bleakness, the book does provide hope. Many people grovel for the Nazis, or save themselves by merely glancing up a stairway to betray where a Jew is hidden in an attic. But others stay on their feet, keep their heads down, and never betray a neighbour. Or even an enemy. Survival is ensured for those who pretend to know so little, that they could not possibly provide information of any value to the Gestapo. Those who resist also risk acts of quiet and immense kindness. The portrayals of tenderness in the novel are astonishing and unexpected passages that are deeply moving. One of these scenes takes place in the Nazi prison where the Quangels are tortured. During this passage, Fallada unfolds an overwhelming and "enduring proof of the fact that love was stronger than hate."

Otto Quangel was a quiet man, who refused to accept Nazi *Aktions* in silence. What happened to him? The title of his book for the European market, *Alone In Berlin*, suggests how he died. Primo Levi, who survived and described the worst horrors of Nazi Germany in *Survival in Auschwitz*, called Fallada's final novel: "The greatest book ever written about the German resistance to the Nazis." Fallada knew the torments he

(*continued on page 39*)



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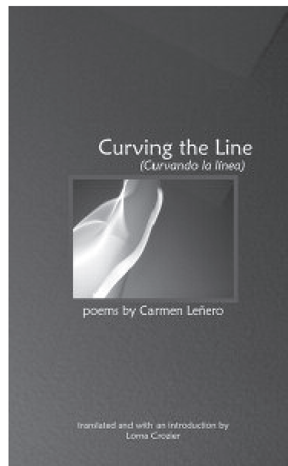

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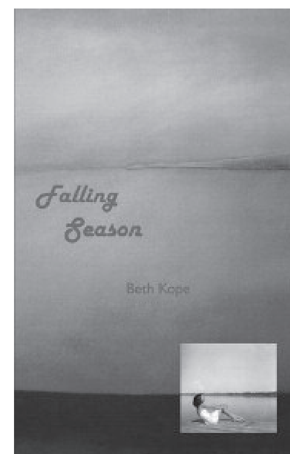

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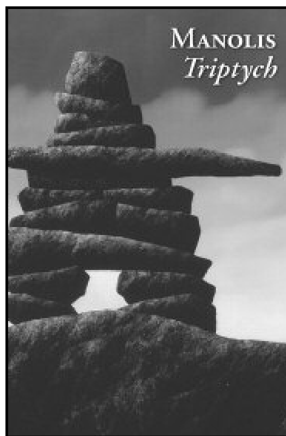
Two by Manolis: *Rendition* and *Triptych*

Amy Henry

Triptych is a new collection of poems by the Greek poet Manolis. Some of the poems refer to states of being, such as "Blushing", "Thirsty" and "Readiness". Most fascinating to me is how he captures a sense of motion just before it begins to take place, almost an anticipation of a gesture. You can sense the imminent action in "Suit:"



Triptych
Manolis
Ekstasis Editions, 2009

Strutting a dark brown suit and
a creamy pale tie, nicely knotted
with a soft beige butterfly
unfurling her wings, laughter
into arms of intense sunlight where
he stands at the bus stop waiting
with those of us without suits
but geared up to arrive at work
he grips the briefcase with valuable documents
his glare cutting through the spines of those
crossing looks with him, you
could say he knows how to keep
his cool in the prison yard

since he was sprung only a month ago

The words tell a simple story and yet underlying it all is a tension formed by the words intense, glare, cutting, grips and crossing. It's subtle and unexpected, and you are left to imagine what violence may occur. You feel this sense of expectation in many of the poems, and it keeps them from feeling dry or overwrought.

The words of Kahlil Gibran also surface in places, where Manolis uses them as a framework for sections of the book. Many of the poems trace phases of relationships, especially love that is shattered by death. Manolis alludes to death frequently, as a constant uninvited guest that manages to linger. In "Teardrop", the impression is of a grieving woman glancing at flowers, and ends with:

Manolis

…a single teardrop laughs
as you're suppose to do
the rest of your life
Look, doesn't it
resemble my smile?
I am in this teardrop…

In "Affirmation", he talks about disappointment:

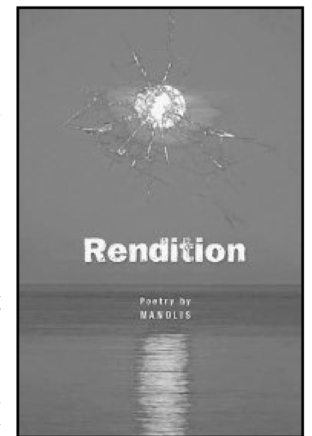
…everything you thought
you wanted so badly
all you assume you are pursuing so decisively
ends up as a dull apparition or yellow phantasm
like the sunken feeling mornings after heavy drinking
maturity nails you like a brick between the eyes…

Throughout the references to violence and death, however, he adds scenes of light and playfulness. In "Soiled", an injured man watches near a pond: "…two birds, arguing about taxes, one sparrow kvetching, one sparrow sobbing, for the right foot, for the left foot, for beauty of understanding…"

The collection as a whole reflects a sense of truth, represented in the balance of everyday insignificances and occasional milestones, all mixed up in the changing weather and seasons and phases of our lives. In this truth, sometimes little things matter more than we'd expect, and greater things pass us silently.

* * *

yet something lurks in the diaphaneity of glass
from "Mirror"



Rendition
Manolis
Libros Libertad, 2009

Glass is not necessarily clear, just as a mirror doesn't always reflect reality. In *Rendition*, the poet Manolis reveals layers of meaning that appear as elusive as a shadow on a broken shard of glass. Quotes from Federico Garcia Lorca and T.S. Eliot preface the segments of the book, and there is a sense of warning given throughout to the reader to focus on the present instead of being immersed in the past or in rehearsal for the future. As always, the language is picturesque, and Manolis describes inner thoughts and outer dialogue in a way that shows the battle between the two, especially in "Tolling Bell", where grief is disturbed by the necessity of trivial funeral preparations.

Biblical allusions abound in this collection: most memorably in "Unexplainable,"

Two sparrows
endearing forms

Hop to mess of potato chips
you threw…

The endless is not more
secret than the finite

It takes two sparrows
and a potato chip

His words recall the verses in Matthew 10 where Jesus mentions two sparrows of small value, and then relays that 'you are worth more than many sparrows'. Just as the seemingly worthless potato chips sustain the birds, the poet reminds the reader of nourishment for the soul.

In "Elegy II", the poem relives the last moments of a soldier's life, as his memories flash before his eyes. He remembers old loves, an old song, and even senses the grief of his mother. The enjambment is placed in a way that tumbles the reader forward to the inevitable moment of death.

Two poems were especially fascinating in how they portray one event : in "Climb" the narrator is admiring a ladybug that has landed on his palm:

My eyes fix on her glamour
grand presence in minute scale

He seems a nice enough guy, yet in "Fourth Paradox", it is figure of death, a "repugnant soulless killer", that looks upon the ladybug he is holding:

He senses ladybug laughing…

He stares at the game of the red
black ladybug whose brilliance
just laughs in serenity …

Just who is who? What has changed? This disparity makes the reader wonder exactly who is in control…does death realize its powerlessness over nature?

This collection is one that requires some meditation to best enjoy. The glimpses of human nature throughout combine to create a pensive mood, one that enables you to consider such phrases as found in "Chrysalis": "What in the image of absence is revealed?"

Amy Henry reviews from California on the website, Black Sheep Dances http://www.theblacksheepdances.com.

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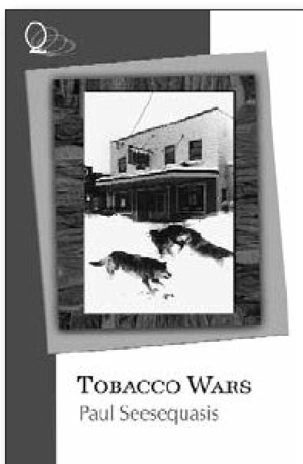

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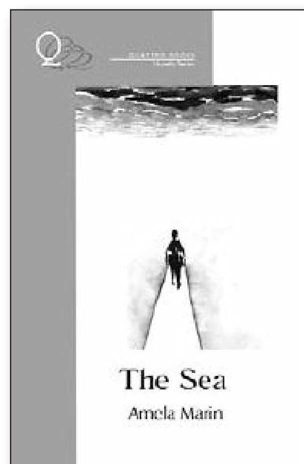


The Sea
Amela Marin

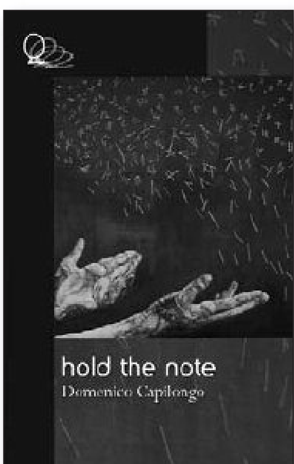
"... a parable of war that has all the force of Brecht, all the subtlety of Beckett."
– Nino Ricci

Gaze
Keith Cadieux

"Gaze *will draw you in and keep you thinking for a long, long time."*
– Warren Cariou

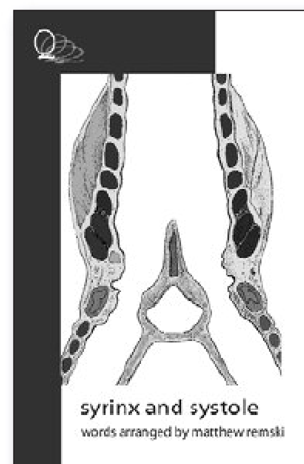
Retina Green
Reinhard Filter

Along with desperation come sharpened, if distorted, perceptions that are often as hillarious as they are terrifying



hold the note
Domenico Capilongo

"... a jazzy synergy ... [it] left me winded with exhilaration."
– Len Gasparini



syrinx and systole
Matthew Remski

If we were to experience such raw song, we would die from uncontrolled internal resonance

Straw Things

Ben Pleasants

I would like to have spent a day interviewing Robinson Jeffers. He was a poet of hard materials. The people he wrote about along the Pacific Coast can hardly be separated from their rocky landscape.

That is also true of Charles Tidler. He is a poet of hard materials. Unlike Jeffers, who *observed* the landscape, Tidler allowed himself to become a part of it. Exiled from the US at a young age, fleeing war, Tidler's life in British Columbia was one of broken moments. With a wife and two children and goats and chickens, his time was spent extracting life from the cold, hard landscape. There is much of the great Chinese and Japanese poets in his work. *Straw Things*, the title of his book, refers to Taoist teacher Chuang Tzu who warned us of the little things in life that bring us down.

Straw Things: Selected Poetry and Song 63-07
Charles Tidler
Ekstasis Editions, 2009

Charles Tidler reveled in those moments: the expired truck, the badly brewed beer, the busted fences of farming, the empty belly of poetry. Somehow, when you are young, life goes on with broken moments of beauty. That's all you have time for:

Damn it's cold/ outside sighting stars/ open cabin door/ to fresh bread smell.

That's the style that caught Charles Bukowski's eye when he met Tidler in Vancouver for one of his final poetry readings. Tidler in his homespun clothes, wrestling with a broken transmission, cut hands , a little grease stuck to his eyelashes. Bukowski liked the Tidler lifestyle. "He could work with his hands, Bukowsi told me when he got back to LA. "Most poets have perfect nails. They never worked. They came from Stamford. But Tidler… he's funny when he's drunk and his wife is beautiful."

Bukowski admired in Tidler what he loved in Jeffers: "the clarity and simplicity. There's no dazzling phraseology." At his best as a poet, Tidler is always looking back at Wang Wei, at Basho, at Kito and Buson. Strip it down and then strip it down and strip it down again until the bones glow in the moonlight. I think he said that one night when we were drunk running around in a swamp on Salt Spring Island.

Time and again he brings it of: the broken moment.

"Tonight I was busy
in the garden
while next door visitors
laughter and music
carry -on

My mind became so fuzzy
—silly!—.
I almost spilled a full bucket
of liquid fertilizer
(water mixed with chicken shit)
on my sandals.

See if that works for you. Read it again. It's clear and simple and yet it brings up so much of what we do in our ordinary, broken moments. There's another element to Tidler too. That his sense of hard survival, Making beauty out of the toughness of life. Bukowski loved that. "Poets pretend so much," he told me. "Tidler has lived it."

Charles Tidler

"Before dining
on this cold winter's evening
let us note the passing
of the snowman's nose

a frozen carrot
sliced into the stew.

That's what Bukowski loved about Tidler. It explains why Tidler sees real beauty in the painter Bonnard and sees only fraud in Picasso. Tidler could carve a wooden spoon from a broken oak branch and he could do it in words too. Canada is lucky to have won him away from a country that would have sent him off to die for nothing in the jungles of Vietnam.

Ben Pleasants is an anarchist poet, playwrite, essayist and novelist who lives with his wife Paula in California.

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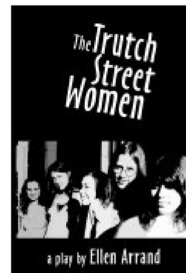

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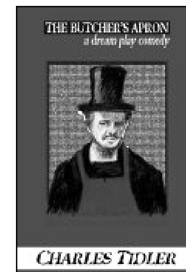
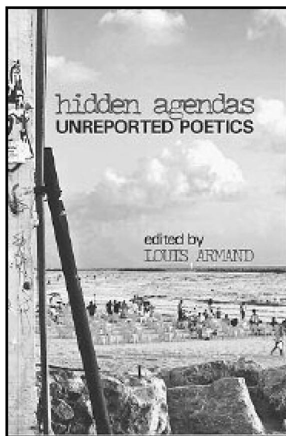


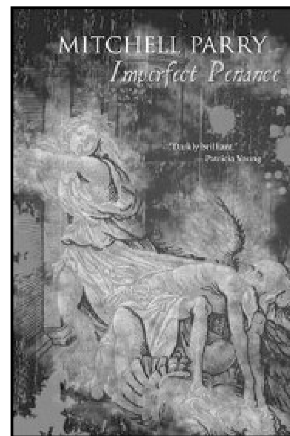
Poetry & Poetics from the Margins

Sanja Garic-Komnenic

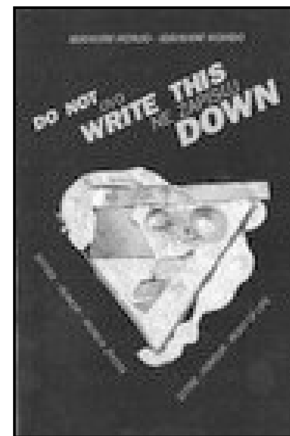
Hidden Agendas. Unreported Poetics is a collection of essays about unrepresented literature that challenges the "normal" critical representation of works of poetry. Contributors were invited to focus on marginal, overlooked authors of their choice, and in this manner defy the established patterns of the critical reception of poetry. The editorial intention is to present works that escape "normalization" by mainstream criticism and academia; however, the fact that the collection is published by the Arts Department of the University of Prague, brings more ambiguity in the discussion about the marginal and demonstrates the ever-present intention of the mainstream to appropriate the innovative, the uncodified. The editor, Louis Armand, emphasizes that the marginal is complex, difficult to define and concludes that "there is no objective marginality."



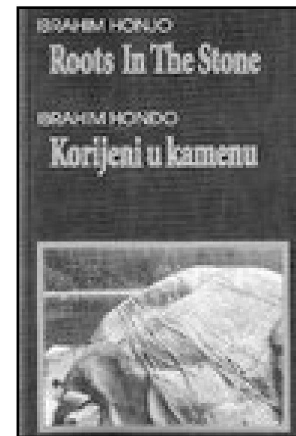
Hidden Agendas. Unreported Poetics
Ed. Louis Armand
Univerziteta Karlova v Praze, Filozofická Fakulta
2010. 278 pp



Imperfect Penance
Mitchell Parry
Goose Lane Editions
2008. 107 pp.



Do Not Write This
Ibrahim Honjo. Trans. from Serbo-Croatian by the author. Ed. Biljana Knezevic. 2006. 192 pp.

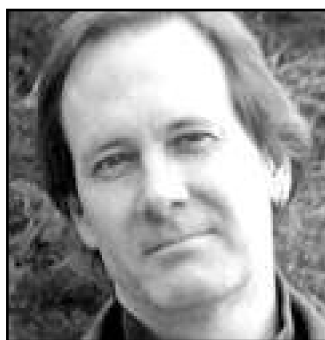


Roots in the Stone
Ibrahim Honjo
Trans. by the author
Ed. Biljana Knezevic.
Back Yard Publishing
2008. 128 pp.

Hidden Agendas contains only works of English-language poetics, which itself testifies that there are many ways of being marginal. Referring to some "double unreported" works, Armand's introduction names a list of poets not addressed in the book. He also reminds us that accident, circumstances, not only the paths of distribution or a too-radical content could also be causes of the marginalization of artworks.

The selections cover a wide range of topic: reflections on the alternative London poetry scene of the 80's, especially Sound Poetry (Robert Sheppard); the "art brut" of underground British poet Mark Hyatt (John Wilkinson); Edwin Denby, a New York Poet absent from major American poetry anthologies (Vincent Katz); William Bronk, a largely unrepresented U.S. poet (Stephan Delbos); Gilbert Sorrentino, marginalized in American Lit due to "the increasing commercialization of publishing industry" (Jeremy M. Davies); Lukas Tomin, a writer of Prague's "post-revolution scene "[o]verlooked by the Czech literary establishment and ignored by publishers in the UK and the US" (Louis Armand); John Kinsella, who subverted Dante's *Divine Comedy* (Ali Alizadeh); Robbie Walker, an Australian Aboriginal poet, "killed in Fremantle Prison in 1984 at the age of twenty-five" (Michael Ferrell); found poetry of Bern Porter (Jena Osman); digital poetry (Stephanie Strickland); and Flarf poetry composed of pieces of text taken from the internet (D.J. Huppatz).

This unusual collection confirms the fundamental status of marginal art—that which escapes codification, "cultural centrality" or appropriation by literary authorities in remaining elusive, indefinable, and constantly emerging. Concluding the volume is Allen Fisher's "Complexity Manifold 2: hypertext", a brilliant reflection on "decoherence", that necessary condition of poetry which refuses to comply with the public demand for "complete meanings." It confirms that the condition of contemporary relevant poetry is its marginality.



Mitchell Parry

Imperfect Penance, a collection of poems and prose works by Michell Parry is, as the author calls it, "A Failed Biography." Perry's work represents the marginal at its best. A fictional biography written as a personal response to the life of Georg Trakl, an Austrian writer born in the late 1880's, it avoids specific categorizations. Parry's collection is superb, exploring the space of ever-evolving and genre-crossing forms. Rather than facts, intuition and supposition provide a more fruitful interpretation of Trakl's life. The book itdelf crosses the boundaries of conventional biography. Perry's literary intuition brings together fragments of the deeply disturbed Austrian poet's life, and thus places the biographer himself in the focus of the work. At the same time Parry reconstructs fragments of life in the decaying Austrian-Hungarian Empire—the artistic circles of Vienna, the horrors of the World War I, the repressive state of the empire's family and social relations. The biographer utilizes narrative techniques from painting: in one scene he follows a stream of light as it enters a shabby room to light upon the face of a sleeping, drunken Trakl. Additionally, he focuses on the missing in Trakl family photographs, filling in the blanks with fragments from the poet's biography, mixing what he knows with what he imagines. This reveals a shifting, undefined, ever-evolving position of the speaker. At times, Parry is an outside observer deeply interested in the life of the poet; then suddenly he becomes the poet, transcending the distance that separates the experience of the observed and that of the observer. Traditional biography would prove a failed form for such a dynamic approach.

Georg Trakl

Do not Write This Down and *Roots in the Stone* are further cases of the marginal destined to isolation from the mainstream by the circumstances of the author's biography. Ibrahim Honjo, a Bosnian poet, lives in English-speaking Vancouver and writes in his native tongue. Suffering from such unfavorable circumstances, he overcomes his isolation through translation and self-publishing. His two collections of poetry with accompanying illustrations—photographs of his own metal sculptures—are both self-translated and self-published.

Ibrahim Honjo

Subversive irony is Honjo's dominant mode of address, an inheritance from his Eastern-European experience. He appropriates the tone of political pamphlets from the ex-Yugoslav socialist era, and mocks those who have dollars instead of eyes, thus creating an equal ironical distance from both socialist propaganda and western consumerism. The *Homo Novus* of his poems is a magician's trick, another ideological "hocus pocus," a new man who *"brought democracy as a gift / and in return…wants us / to become members of his party/"*

Ironical distance is also prevalent in the poems referring to the war in his native country. It is bitter and deeply disturbing: the war is presented as a boy's game with plenty of "bang bang bang." It is a game with no heroes: *"for what purpose my heroes fall / why they are not in poetry any more / why did they fall /"* A sense of the uselessness of war and anger at the loss of lives dominates the poems of this cycle.

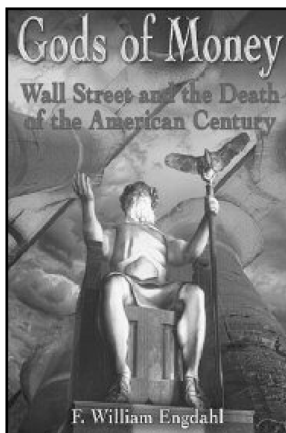
Honjo's second collection *Roots in the Stone*, offers central poetical references

(*continued on page 39)*

Wall Street and the Death of the American Century

Reg Little

William Engdahl's latest book is another awesome exploration and explanation of the boldness and failings of Anglo-American global strategy over most of the past century and a half. Engdahl recalls in his introduction a statement from the 1970s attributed to then-U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, a protégé of the powerful Rockefeller circles, in which he declared, "If you control the oil, you control entire nations; if you control the food, you control the people; if you control the money, you control the entire world."



Gods of Money
William Engdahl
Global Research

With *Gods of Money*, Engdahl completes the trilogy, which with *A Century of War: Anglo-American Oil Politics and the New World Order, and Seeds of Destruction: The Hidden Agenda of Genetic Manipulation,* explores the ways in which U.S. plutocrats and the people around them would appear to have sought to control oil, food and money in seeking to establish their sense of global order.

For anyone interested in the contemporary world, its politics and its tragedies, Engdahl's books are obligatory reading. He explains how, as enormous wealth concentrated into the hands of a few American families, notably those of the Morgans and Rockefellers, the United States developed a remarkable strategy that concentrated power through the mastery of global finance, backed by military expedience. Like a growing number of other writers, however, he leaves no doubt that this strategy has run into serious troubles, devastating Americans as much as the intended subjects of an American Century.

Engdahl's Left-leaning analysis highlights early the reality that "power, together with control over the nation's economy, was being ruthlessly centralized in the hands of the wealthy few, every bit as much as it had been in the days of Imperial Rome." He puts it brutally in these words:

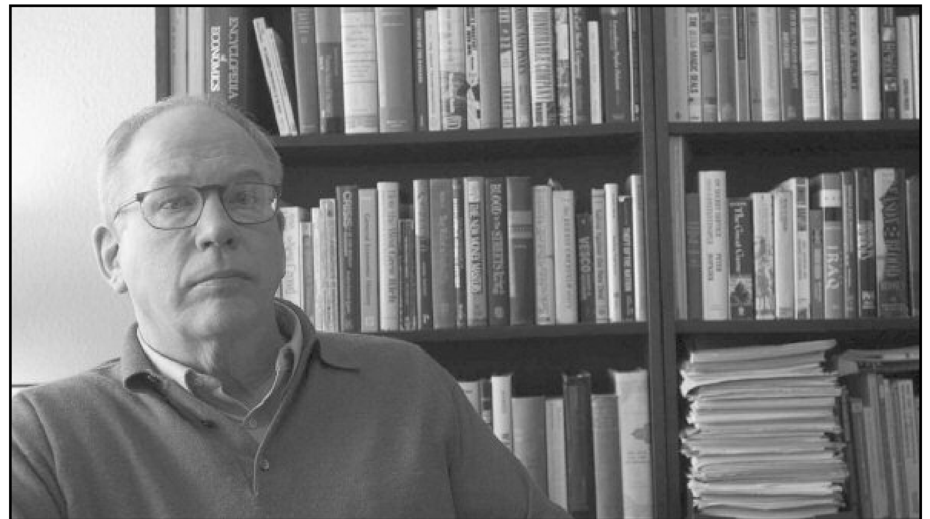
> *Some 60 families—names like Rockefeller, Morgan, Dodge, Mellon, Pratt, Harkness, Whitney, Duke, Harriman, Carnegie, Vanderbilt, DuPont, Guggenheim, Astor, Lehman, Warburg, Taft, Huntington, Baruch and Rosenwald— formed a close network of plutocratic wealth that manipulated, bribed, and bullied its way to control the destiny of the United States.*

He continues:

> *They operated in absolute secrecy, lest the general public understand how the banks' money manipulated political decisions behind the scenes, including decisions to go to war or to keep the peace. The shock of these passages rests in the realization that these forces defined the 20th Century and are threatening various disasters for large populations at the beginning of the 21st Century, and yet remain largely unidentified in the mind of the voting electorate. Central to the story are the consequences of the legislation that established the Federal Reserve in 1913, placing it under the control of private bankers able to access the taxes of ordinary citizens*

Engdahl draws attention to the fact that when the dominant role of the City of London over the terms of world trade was lost to the United States in the two great wars of the 20th Century, "America was to be an empire in much the same way that Great Britain had been an Empire after 1815, with one significant difference. America's economic imperialism would disguise itself under the rhetorical cover of 'spreading free enterprise,' and supporting 'national self-determination' and 'democracy.' The term 'empire' was to be scrupulously avoided."

Engdhal recounts how Americans believed propaganda that asserted America's God-given 'Manifest Destiny' to expand its frontiers and plunder other countries. He argues that The Cold War, for example, was fought by 'American democracy' against 'Godless Communism' and gave the advance of American interests "a messianic religious cover that was astonishingly effective for decades."



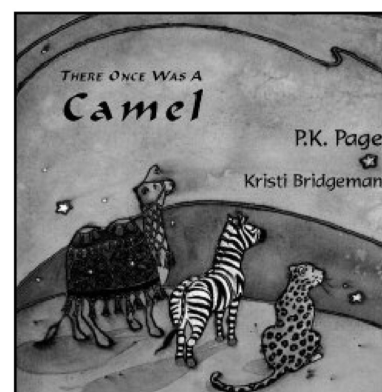
William Engdahl

Paired with this propaganda mechanism was the construction of new International Financial Institutions after the Second World War, where the IMF become the global financial 'policeman,' under the control of America and, to a lesser degree, Britain. This was used to enforce the payment of "usurious debts through imposition of the most draconian austerity in history." 'Free trade' and a 'level playing field' continued to be "the rallying cry of the strongest, most advanced economies, seeking to open up less developed markets for their goods."

The consequences have been severe. As America's most talented minds were increasingly drawn to Wall Street with its far greater executive compensation, the nation's industrial base entered a terminal decline. Neglect with this decline in industrial, educational and scientific competitiveness made inevitable the off-shoring of American industry, something that remains poorly, if at all, understood in America. It is, of course well understood in Japan, China and elsewhere in Asia. Meanwhile, as industrial output has declined, education has deteriorated, and indebtedness has exploded.

By contrast, Engdahl observes that during the past 40 years, the financial sector's share of total profits has grown from 2% to 40%. This highlights the manner in which American abuse of its global power in organizations like the IMF has also harmed the U.S. as much as anyone. Indeed, in a bizarre, unique equation, American consumption—which between 2000 and 2007 was still one-third of growth globally—had by 2009, as one estimate reports, produced an annual U.S. deficit of more than $5 trillion. With its concluding review of the decline of the Roman Empire, Engdahl's latest has an ominous ring.

A former Ambassador, Reg Little writes on International Relations for* PRRB *from Brisbane, Australia.



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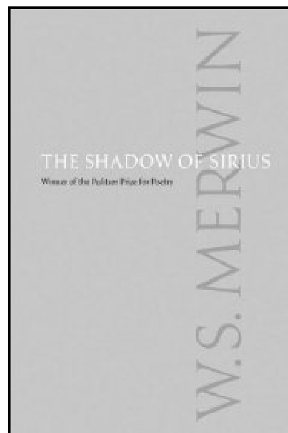
The Shadow of Sirius

Hannah Main-van der Kamp

I have with me
all that I do not know
I have lost none of it



The Shadow of Sirius
WS Merwin
Copper Canyon Press
2009, $16 US

Monet of memory, Merwin paints the same scenes again and again without repeating himself, always using just a slightly different combination of strokes and angles of light. His version of Giverny lilies (hushed valley, hay meadow, water birds, a childhood home, dust in a sun beam) is the fleeting visual moments of a sensually alert child. Is Merwin's memory more acute than that of most people? How does he recall those ephemeral but exact sense impressions of the manse in which he grew up, his distant relations, of his young adult travels, of his village home in southwestern France?

Hazed light, soft shadows, leaves stirring, cool breath of day, the white petals of the plum trees in flower, the sound of sheep bells; is Merwin writing the same poem over and over? These particular images are actually not from a poem in *Sirius* but the opening of an essay, The Stone Boat, in which he describes the human paleontology (Neanderthal) of his French village environs. They could just as well have been drawn from *The Vixen* (1995) or from *Sirius*.

"Such is memory that I see it as though it had always looked just as it does at the moment, although it has changed every time I have see it. From morning to evening. From day to day, from season to season." So opens that essay, followed by a few descriptive pages before launching into a detailed account of the first paleontologists to make scholarly discoveries there.

Merwin too is a paleontologist, of buried scent/light/sound/texture, voices.

How does Merwin do it. What are the mechanics of this magic?

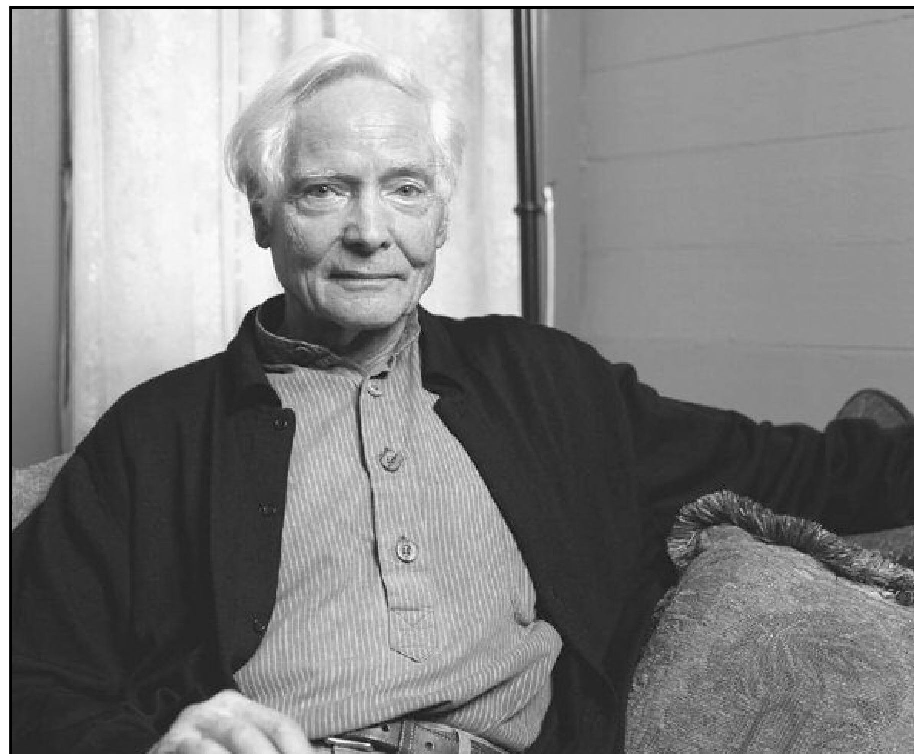
The lanky, unpunctuated lines are his trademarks, though in *Sirius*, the poems look slighter on the page. Without indicating pauses for breath or shifts in thought and imagery, Merwin shows how, in the grammar of memory, the little word "and" (it can occur a dozen times in a poem) has the subtle power of accretion.

Now in his mid-eighties, Merwin grew up in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Translator and prize winning poet, now a cultivator of rare palm trees in Maui, Merwin is known to be reclusive. (Though he did give a reading in Seattle in the Fall of 2009 to promote this book and its publisher.) Everything that can be known about him is in the poems and an occasional hints in his prose pieces. In *The Mays of Ventidorm* (2002) and elsewhere, Merwin obliquely revealed some of the events that brought him to buy an old French farmhouse. He revisits the scenery and village again in *Sirius*.

In *Unframed Originals*, (1982) Merwin described his forbears, extended family, his parents and the recollections of his childhood. To have read some of these pieces prior to reading *Sirius* adds depth that might otherwise make some poems to be almost generic. It is very helpful, for example, to know that Merwin's rigid and irritable father pastored a number of Presbyterian congregations. There are glimpses of the dourness, the sermons. In a poem about a mole," *the earth/ has been touched and raised/ eye has not seen it come/ ear has not heard*". Readers familiar with the Bible will pick up the Scriptural allusions as in,

> *… light through the tall windows*
> *a sunbeam sloping like a staircase*
> *and from beyond it my father's voice*
> *telling about a mote in an eye*
> *that was like a mote in a sunbeam*

Yet one would not wish for the poet to add more biographical notes to the poems because in so doing they would lose their floating meta-awareness. It's a tight rope that Merwin walks between not quite enough context and too much. Lesser skilled poets often fall off that rope. True, he has been writing for more than forty decades with something like sixty titles to his credit. Though his earliest poems were uniquely startling, you wouldn't mistake *Sirius* (which won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry)f or the work of a young man. Some of these new poems are so lacking in particulars they seem to float off the page, so lacking in substance. Like Monet's last water lilies, representation of literal particulars is almost completely erased in favour of light strokes, swift daubs, hinting at essences not specifics.



W.S. Merwin, photo by Matt Valentine

How exactly does he do it? His trademark since his earliest books in the 1950's has been to dispense with grammar and punctuation. Because his line breaks are not breath stops and there are zero periods, the reader must find her own inflections. That necessitates rereading, finding the structure and pauses oneself which adds to the engagement and surprises. Merwin does not intend to have readers lose their way but he does lead the follower on a circular path at times, to walk the trail again to figure out where it is going. Grammar is a construct and memory has no need of it. The repetition of sets of words make for a chant like slowing down, a reverie.

The trove of childhood/young adulthood sensual memories, though unusually evocative, is not the heart of *Sirius*. Neither does it focus on the age of the aging poet. Merwin's occupation here is the relationship between past and present. There is none; they are one.

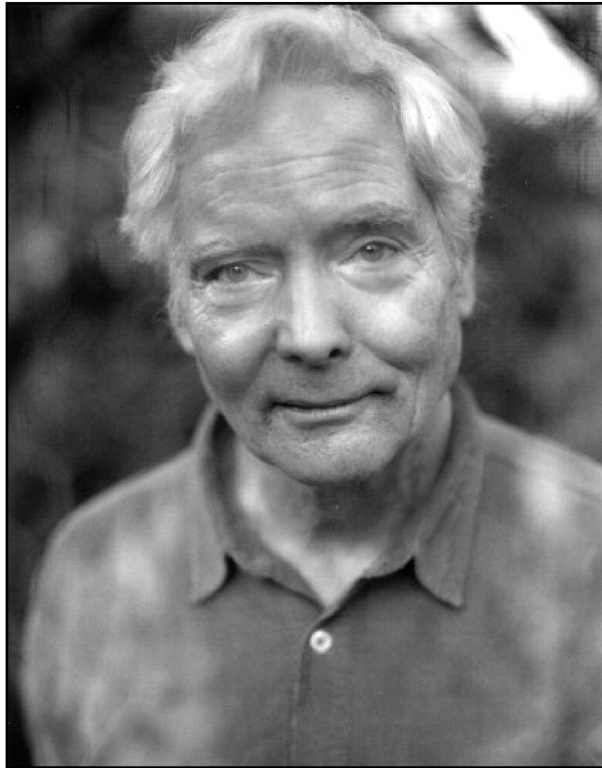
> *"See how the past is not finished*
> *here in the present*
> *it is awake the whole time*"

The recollections are often from the perspective of the identified present moment but the action/scenery/observances are set in the past. Is it compulsive, Merwin's backward glance? With all that remembering, does the reader crave a direct shot of the present day? No, because his past has the power of a direct hit. When the poet uses the word "yesterday" as in Youth of Grass, he does not mean the day before today but as, *"it seems only yesterday that… the first hay was cut in that French meadow"*."

To be in the present moment, the hope of mystics in every religion, does not exclude the past. To deeply experience one's own experiences across time is to transcend the artificial distinctions placed on time. After all, "eternity" does not mean endless time but no time at all. In this sense of timelessness, Merwin's work can be viewed as spiritual.

"So what", a critic might ask. Do these poems change anything in the present world of greed and violence? Are these poems anymore than the self-indulgent nostalgia of an aging, privileged wordsmith? What's the use of all those moonlit still valleys?

Merwin makes it possible to go back to the stillness that we all know but fre-



W.S. Merwin

quently lose. His recollected calmness takes us to the meditative, non-ordinary state, which is the centre of our lives. Without grabbing or rushing, without opinions or declarations, without sentimentality, Merwin is the hermit guide to that still point.

The still point cannot be grasped. "*from what we cannot hold the stars are made*". If the equanimity were a product, it would disappear with the purchase of it. What the poet and reader cherish is not an experience that can be manufactured at will. It cannot be commanded.

… it remains
out of reach and will not be caught or named
or called back and if I could make it stay
as I want to it would turn into pain

Does he ever have a sad or enraging memory? Injustice and misunderstanding are the lot of every human; why no poems about that?

They are not without shadows. Losses are threaded through many of these titles, as is death. But the regrets are not disabling. Though he hints at his ecological despair, he was never a raging poet. Not that he has no need to rage. In *The Rain in the Trees*, Merwin's disgust and outrage at the 19th century rape of Hawaii was palpable.

Conflicts that occur in every life, even a privileged one like Merwin's, have transmuted into … into what? It is no accident that the book's title contains both the brightest of stars and its other dark side, a side to which many poems refer. The Laughing Thrush, last poem in the book, begins with, "*the nameless joy of the morning*", that will go on "*whether or not there is anyone listening*".

The "Golden World" of Edenic memory; is it an illusion? The reader drawn to it may recognize nostalgia for the days of those innocent receptors, the senses. Homesickness for that lost garden is hardwired in human consciousness. We know it, long for it and also resist it. When we read poems like this, we are transported back into a past that comes with us into the present. It has transforming power, for a brief moment. Then we return to the world of consensus reality with its hard edges. At the periphery of awareness, the shimmer of Eden flirts with us. We ignore it, mostly. That's why we turn to Merwin; his poems seduce, overcome our resistances and then we return to the lucent days.

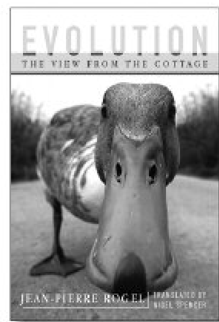
"*When we look for what we have lost…*" Recalling people and places, most of us have a choice: be numbed out with devastation or let the past interleaf with the now. Friends, animals, and the clearness of the morning light: they are not lost, *"they are all here."*

In *Sirius*, as in *The Pupil*, *The River Sound*, *The Rain in the Trees*, Merwin so integrates the past with the present that there is no distinction between memory and this day's reality. The moments cannot be captured or called back or made to stay. They come when they come but they are never lost. The memories come in secret

… an unchanged astonishment
that has never been tamed or named
nor held in the hand
nor ever fully seen
but it is still the same
a vision before news a gift
of flight in a dream
of clear depths where I glimpse
far out of reach the lucent days
from which now I am made.

***Hannah Main – van der Kamp, poet, teacher and reviewer lives at Black Point on BC's Upper Sunshine Coast. Her last collection of poems was* According to Loon Bay.**

Holiday Essentials



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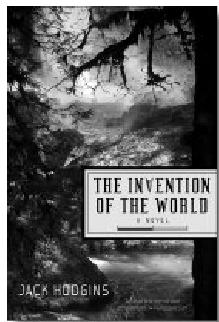

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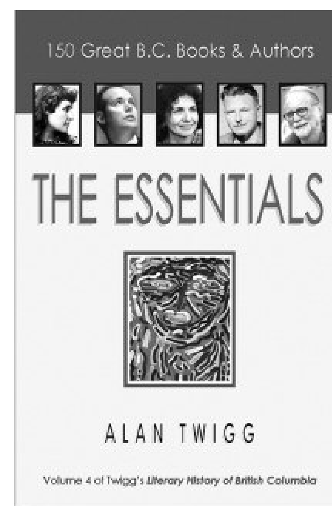

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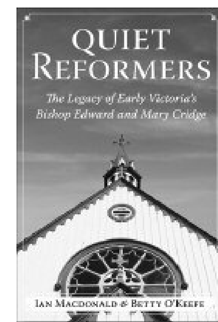

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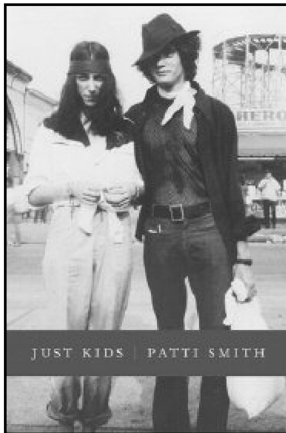
Holding Hands with God

Joseph Blake

Here are two, fine, new books that offer moving, and honest depictions of youth, friendship, rebellion, art, fame, bad behavior, and, in the words of Patti Smith "holding hands with god."

An acclaimed musician and published poet, Smith's first book of prose is a celebration of her love for the artist/photographer Robert Mapplethorpe. Its focus is their pact to care for each other as they created themselves and their art in the epochal late-60's and early 1970's in New York. It's a tender and tough memoir that captures the pair's youthful naivety and idealistic devotion to art and each other. From the opening chapter's depiction of a sickly, bookish, Jersey girl to the elegiac final chapter, *Just Kids* describes a unique, spiritual twinning of two soulful, visionary artists.



Just Kids
Patti Smith,
Ecco/Harper Collins,
279 pp. cloth, $31.99

Smith tells her youthful tale with a dry, understated narrative voice. Her memories are exacting and detailed, but the author's style is unadorned. It flows with straightforward, conversational pace. You can almost hear simple rock rhythms and middle-American twang. It's a wonderful read.

Smith captures the deep and abiding friendship that grew out of a chance encounter through homeless-jobless-hunger to a backlit prelude to fame. The author's description of the pair's admittance to Warhol's sacred table at the fabled bar, Max's Kansas City is worth the price of the book for its brutally honest, dizzying images.

A Visit From the Goon Squad
Jennifer Egan
Knopf, 274 pp. cloth,
$30

Just Kids is also haunted by the ghosts of Ginsberg, Burroughs, Hendrix and Joplin, as Smith recounts her years with Mapplethorpe at the Chelsea Hotel. Sam Shephard, Dylan and a cast of New York characters inhabit the edges of the love story.

In 1975, Smith's breakthrough recording, *Horses* foreshadowed the emergence of punk. In 1989, after blazing like a comet across the art world, Mapplethorpe died of AIDs. Smith and Mapplethorpe's photographs of their life together have an intimate, in-the-moment charm that adds another layer of beauty to Smith's narrative. There is a lot of beauty between these pages and a lot of love too.

Jennifer Egan's fourth novel, *A Visit From the Goon Squad,* is a very exciting, post-modern mash-up and simultaneously, a romantic, Dickensian romp. Egan carves out a circuitous meditation on the human condition, while slice-and-dicing a handful of distinct voices through five decades and a gauntlet of stylistic devices. She channels everything from a PowerPoint presentation to a parody of celebrity journalism and the cult of fame, but at the heart of the tale is the bright, but damaged kleptomaniac, Sarah and her driven, self-destructive music mogul boss, Bernie Salazar.

Patti Smith with Robert Mapplethorpe

Jennifer Egan, photo by Pieter Van Hattem/Vistalux

Scotty Hausmann, Bernie's band-mate in another life, back in 1979 San Francisco punk band, plays another pivotal role in this time-traveling carousel of character development, harrowing backstory, and redemption. The Lear-like, L.A. record man, Lou Kline is another wonderfully drawn, sad villain.

Egan is such a smart, open-hearted writer that you'll weep for this collection of creeps. Her depiction of how rebellious youth ages and how bad influences corrupt is as sweet as it is bitter. The characters' ugly, flawed and fearful lives in New York, San Francisco, Naples and Africa, their youthful folly and abandon, the long shadow of failure and their mutating, lifelong friendships all share a transcendent note with Smith and Mapplethorpe's ethos of redemption through art and music. It's Egan's best move, a bit of brilliant, yea-saying magic. This is a very good book.

Joseph Blake writes on international travel for many journals and is jazz columnist for PRRB.

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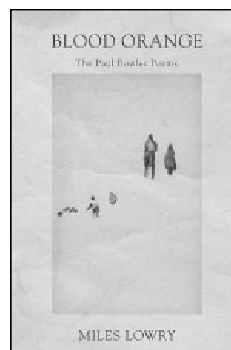

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Blood Orange is one artist's personal response to another artist. An inveterate traveler, composer and writer, Paul Bowles was a truly remarkable figure whose life and work embodied and responded to the major impulses of the twentieth century. His 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.

Miles Lowry lives and works in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada where he is Artistic Co-Director for Suddenly Dance Theatre. Author of five previous books of poetry, he is also known as a painter, sculptor, photographer and theatrical designer. His work is seen in a wide variety of exhibitions, performances and publications.

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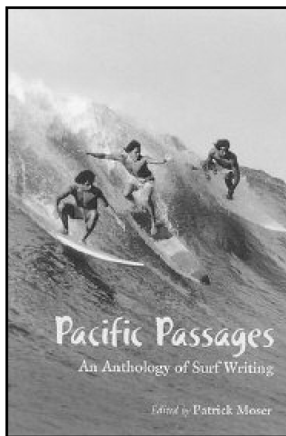
Pacific Passages

Lane Anderson

Surfing is a word that has a web of strings attached to it, each one pulling memories, feelings, and images from the mind. We all relate to it in a different way. Some of us may have tried surfing on a tropical holiday, some may have only a vague understanding of the wave-riding sport, and maybe some are those who live and breathe for piloting the slippery slopes of the swelling sea. Historically, surfing was enjoyed by Polynesians, who meticulously crafted thick wooden boards to glide over curling waves to shore, impressing any witnesses with their prowess. The act of surfing has changed little since, but the culture surrounding it has, immensely. Patrick Moser, the editor of this volume, explores centuries of evolving perspectives on surfing, and finishes by asking simply and in a contemporary way "what is surfing?" One knee-jerk reply would be, "a sport." But as the collected pieces gradually reveal, that definition lacks terribly. Surfing is a lifestyle; for many it's a community, a global one.



Pacific Passages
Patrick Moser, ed.
Univ. of Hawaii Press
2008. 338 pp

It's a passion. It's also an industry.

Moser's anthology introduces us to a broad variety of writing; he has collected everything from personal diaries to magazine articles. The content is diverse, spanning four centuries, and comes from Polynesian historians, from songs, poems, and chants, from crew members of Captain Cook's voyages, and from writers including, among others, Mark Twain, Jack London, Tom Wolfe, and Miki Dora.

The earliest dated writing comes from Sir Joseph Banks, botanist aboard Captain James Cook's historic voyage. On May 28, 1769, he witnesses Polynesian islanders happily riding large, powerful surf and, in astonishment, writes "if the best swimmer in Europe had, by any accident, been exposed to its fury, I am confident that he would not have been able to preserve himself from drowning." To Europeans, big waves and rough waters were a place of life-threatening danger, not enjoyment. Several other explorers write with intrigue about the Polynesian men and women, young and old, finding great pleasure playing in the waves so naturally and gracefully, as if they were "amphibious." The activity was such a foreign concept that many of the explorers and early tourists agreed, including Mark Twain after trying it for himself in 1866, that no white-man could ever master the art of surf riding.

It wasn't until the beginning of the 20th century that surfing made its way across the Pacific to California. Jack London, Alexander Hume Ford, and George Freeth can be credited for introducing surfing to America and the Western world. In time, the beach boy image became the model for surfers—all day at the beach, music, storytelling, partying. The concept evolved and became a community.

However, around the middle of the 20th century surfing began to lose its roots as a social, communal activity, becoming more independent and aggressive. With help from pop bands like the Beach Boys, surfing also became overwhelmed by a new demographic: teenagers. Unsurprisingly, this quickly resulted in a "packaging and commodification of America's newest recreational fad", as Moser describes it in an editorial note. At this same time surfing also began, for the first time, to reveal itself as a competitive sport, and several of the contributors from this period express harsh criticism about the transformation. Most notably is Miki Dora's piece called "Mickey on Malibu" from 1968, which begins by saying "when I say the Malibu Contest, I mean it in the simplest form of mass boredom and unimpeachable incompetence due to the power structure of the people who control these events".

Patrick Moser

Surfing as it was observed in 18th century Hawaii was a communal, leisure activity. Mastering the powerful waves rolling over shallow rock and reef determined who was the most skilled. It also demonstrated the attractiveness of the individual. Those who rode the largest waves and more narrowly avoided the jagged rocks and looming cliff faces were the objects of desire. Stories about their feats would become legendary.

Moser's more contemporary selections see surfing become increasingly cross-generational again. Importantly, the understanding emerges that "surfer" is an identity only abstractly tied to surfing. Surfers who, at an older age, no longer spend much time in the water still retain a connection with the sport. Surfing has a way of permeating your life in so many ways. The identity has more to do with the understanding between you and the sea than the act of balancing on a board and hurtling towards shore. It's a relationship between one small human and one enormous ocean, and their mutual respect.

At the same time, surfing has now long been an established recreational industry. Surf apparel corporations hold heavy influence over the landscape of wave riders, and surfboard technology has become a factor in a way it never had before. Surfing today is not the simple leisure-time activity it was for the Polynesians.

Readers will find that Moser's chronological collection represents many of the diverse faces of surfing, reaching as far back in history as it has been placed on record. It offers a serious, holistic view of this iconic sport, and through its recognition of surfing's historical relevance, it reminds us too of its cultural importance.

The final entries of *Pacific Passages* become increasingly philosophical in nature. Thomas Farber's "On Water" is about an aging surfer who struggles to justify a life-long dedication and passion for surfing to a world that can't relate. He asks the ultimate existential question. "Is surfing enough to define – to defend – a life?"

For countless surfers around the world, more than likely the answer is "definitely." It's this question, I think, that the whole book serves to ask. As this diverse range of pieces affirms, surfing is many things. The answers are unique to ourselves.

Lane Anderson has lived in Australia and understands wild surf. A student of English, he writes from Maple Ridge, B.C.

FALLADA (*continued from page 30*)

described. He had been held in a Nazi insane asylum, and survived long enough to pose some of the most difficult questions of the 20th Century. He provided straightforward answers to them in *Every Man Dies Alone.* How did it happen? First the people of Germany elected Hitler. Then they accepted and supported his marginalization of, and attacks on, minorities, immigrants and Jews. Then they colluded with the Nazi destruction of one of the formerly great nations of Europe. After betraying themselves, it was easy to betray the innocent.

Some of Fallada's answers reassure us. And others give us pause to consider the consequences of our own choices in our daily lives. Fallada wrote *Every Man Dies Alone* (*Jeder stirbt für sich allein*) in a 24 day long, morphine fueled bender. We had to wait more than 60 years for this book to be published in English. It's a good time to read it now, look around, and see what is gradually unfolding in North America. We, of course, live in a kinder gentler time and nation, whose once kind and gentle social values and programs are under attacks, both subtle and barefaced. We do know what is happening.

James Edward Reid is a Canadian writer. His mother's parents emigrated from Germany to Canada, and his father's parents emigrated from England. His father served in the Royal Canadian Air Force in World War II.

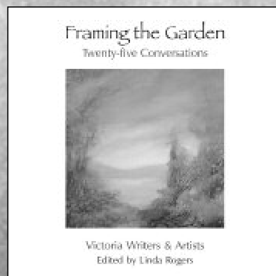
POETRY FROM THE MARGINS (*continued from page 34*)

drawn from the elemental forces of nature. The poet identifies with his native landscape, Herzegovina, with its rocks, vineyards, and the river Naro, whose waters "are flowing through my veins." Drawing his power from the water and his identity from the stone of his homeland, he refuses to be imprisoned by nostalgia, however, claiming "I will never return".

As collections of poetry "from the margins", but for the fact that they are essentially elusive, fluid and thus inherently marginal, each of these new books defies any attempt to identify their common denominator.

Recently returned from Istanbul, Sanja Garic-Komnenic is a frequent contributor to* PRRB. *She teaches at BCIT.

DANCING ON THE EDGE OF THE PACIFIC RIM



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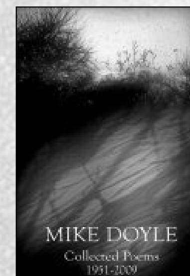

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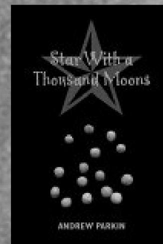

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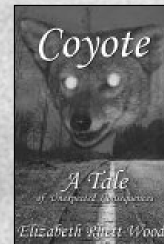

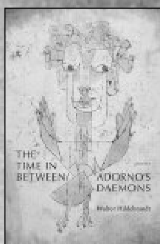

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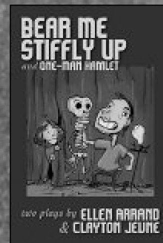

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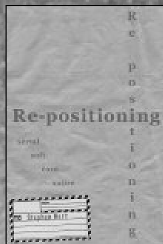

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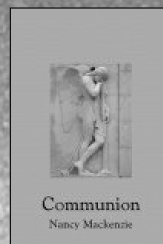

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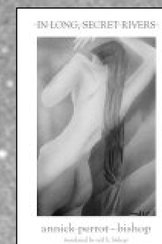

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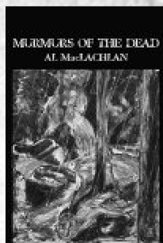

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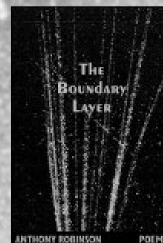

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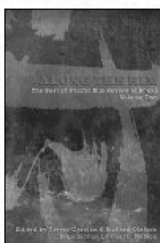

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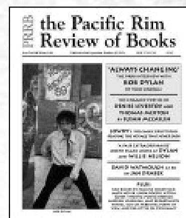

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