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# the Pacific Rim Review of Books

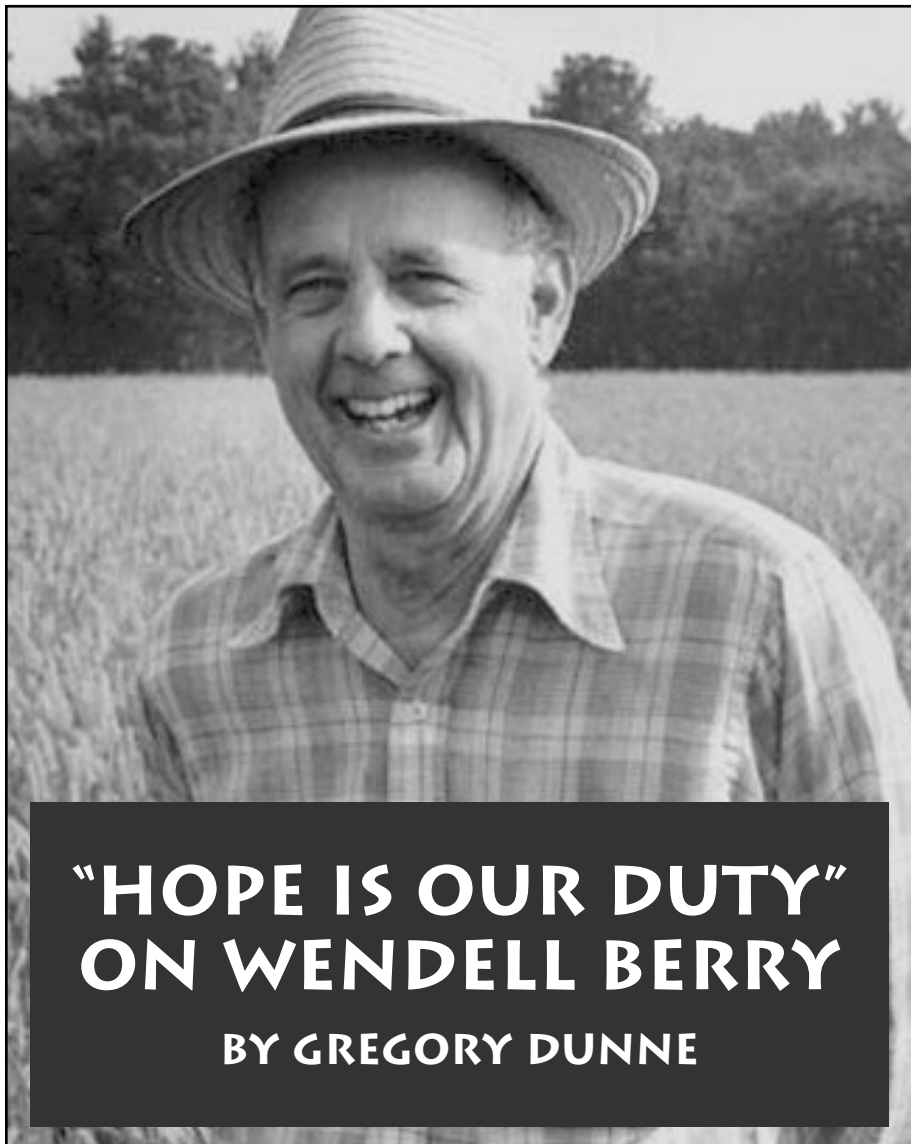
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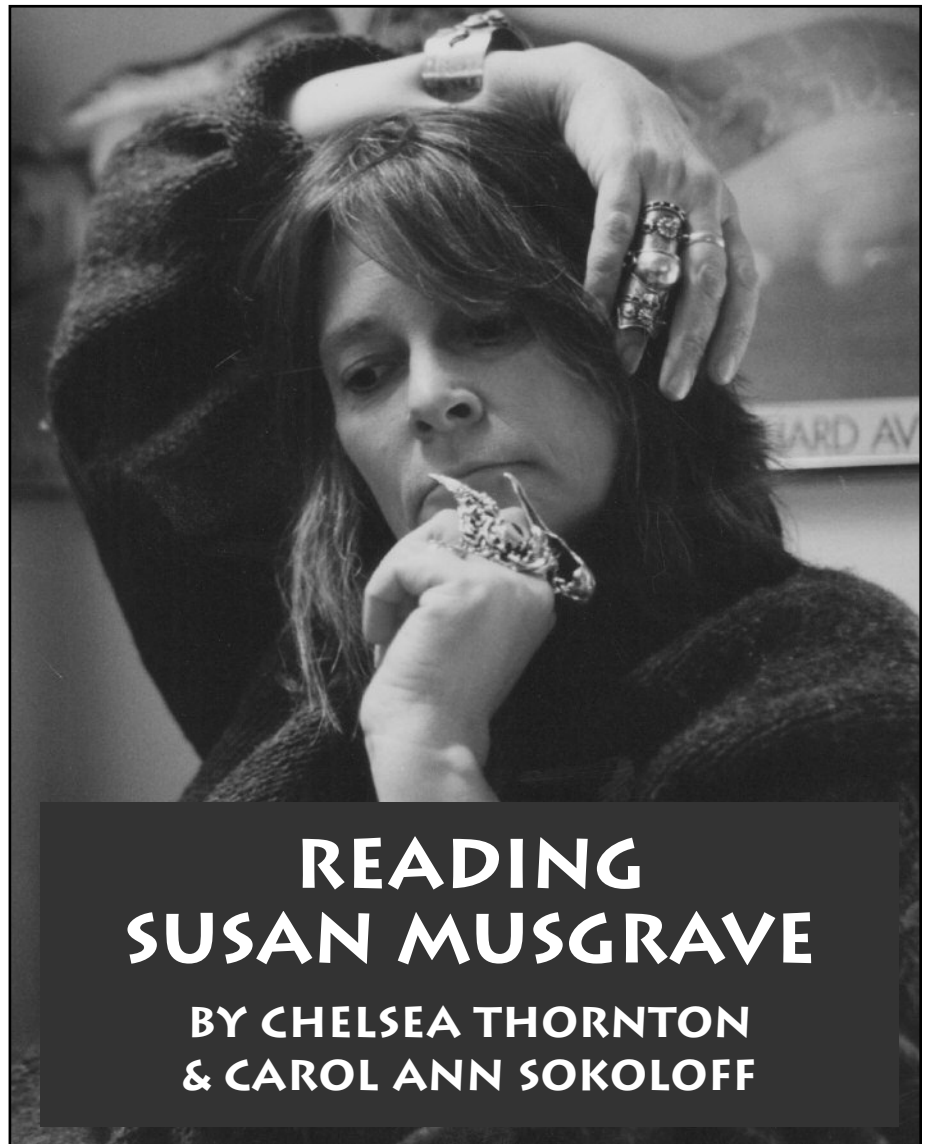
## END OF SUMMER HARVEST OF WRITERS & BOOKS



**"HOPE IS OUR DUTY"  
ON WENDELL BERRY**

BY GREGORY DUNNE

*Wendell Berry*



**READING  
SUSAN MUSGRAVE**

BY CHELSEA THORNTON  
& CAROL ANN SOKOLOFF

*Susan Musgrave, photo by Martin de Valk*

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**ROCK & ROLL OUTLAW: JOSEPH BLAKE  
READS KEITH RICHARDS' BOOK *LIFE***

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**PAUL FALARDEAU REVIEWS  
ED SANDERS & EDITOR VINCENT KATZ**

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**WHEN THE WHOLE  
WORLD WAS ITALIAN**

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**LINDA ROGERS TALKS  
TO GLEN SORESTAD**

---

**APIS TEICHER REVIEWS  
KATHERINE GOVIER'S *THE GHOST BRUSH***

---

**RADICAL POET'S REPUBLIC: JORDAN  
ZINOVICH ON RICHARD BRAUTIGAN**

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**ALAN GRAUBARD ON PIERRE  
CLASTRES' *ARCHEOLOGY OF VIOLENCE***

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**PLUS: NEW WOMEN'S POETRY FROM JAPAN,  
DOUGLAS COUNTY JAIL BLUES & MUCH MORE**



# PRRB

## Pacific Rim Review of Books

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### CONTENTS

#### FEATURES

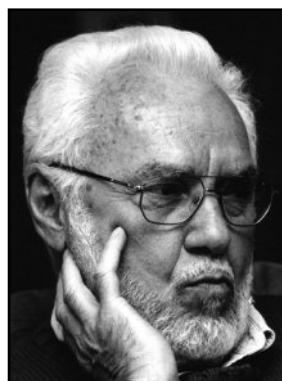
- "Yes, Hope Is Our Duty: On Wendell Berry's Leavings"  
Reviewed by Gregory Dunne page 3
- "Linda Rogers Talks To Glen Sorestad": *What We Miss* by Glen Sorestad  
Review and interview by Linda Rogers page 9
- "Radical Poet's Republic: Richard Brautigan in San Francisco, 1956-1958"  
By Jordan Zinovich page 16
- "Reading Susan Musgrave": *When the World Is Not Our Home* and *Obituary of Light: the Sangam River Meditations* by Susan Musgrave  
Reviewed by Chelsea Thornton page 24
- "It Doesn't Get Any Easier" *Origami Dove* by Susan Musgrave  
Reviewed by Carol Ann Sokoloff page 24
- The Ghost Brush* by Katherine Govier  
Reviewed by Apis Teicher page 28
- "Who Was A t' Serstevens?"  
By Alexander Nouvel page 29

#### DEPARTMENTS

- Music Books: "Just Like a Rollin' Stone": *Life* by Keith Richards  
Reviewed by Joseph Blake page 6
- "When the Whole Wide World Was Italian": *Amore* by Mark Rotella  
Reviewed by Joseph Blake page 7
- Travel: "A Map of Sorts: A Letter From Istanbul": *The Museum of Innocence*  
by Orhan Pamuk, travelogue and review by Linda Rogers page 27
- Point of View: "In Contempt and Anger": *Harperland: The Politics of Control*  
by Lawrence Martin, reviewed by R.T. James page 34
- International Relations: *American War Machine: Deep Politics, the CIA Global Drug Connection, and the Road to Afghanistan* by Peter Dale Scott  
Reviewed by R.T. James page 39

#### REVIEWS

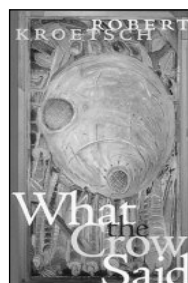
- The Art of Breathing Underwater* by Cathy Ford  
Reviewed by Ali Siemens page 8
- "Mending the Unmendable": *Words Like Distant Rain* by Jakucho Setouchi  
and Tess Gallagher, reviewed by Micheline Soong page 11
- "Sex Shaman": *Red Erotic* by Janet Rogers  
Reviewed by Linda Rogers page 12
- Ghostmasters* by Mani Rao  
Reviewed by JoAnn Dionne page 13
- Subject to Change* by Renee Rodin  
Reviewed by Judith Copithorne page 14
- Revs of the Morrow* by Ed Sanders; *Vanitas 5* edited by Vincent Katz  
Reviewed by Paul Falardeau page 15
- Douglas County Jail Blues* edited by Brian Daldorph  
Reviewed by James D. Sullivan page 21
- Archeology of Violence* by Pierre Clastres  
Reviewed by Alan Graubard page 22
- "How to Fake Romance...": *How to Fake Romance When Your Love Is Real*  
by Martin VanWoudenberg, reviewed by Ali Siemens page 23
- It Is I, Patricia: an artist's childhood* by Pate Martin Bates  
Reviewed by Linda Rogers page 23
- "The Ethnographer's Workshop": *The Lil'wat World of Charlie Mack*  
by Dorothy Kennedy and Randy Bouchard, reviewed by Peter Grant page 26
- "Spring Winds: The Birthing of Japan's New Women's Poetry":  
*Other Side River*, edited by Leza Lowitz and Miyuke Aoyama;  
*A Long Rainy Season*, edited by Lowitz, Aoyama and Akemi Tomoika  
Reviewed by Trevor Carolan page 31
- Blood, Feathers & Holy Men* by Ben Nuttal-Smith  
Reviewed by Sheila Martindale page 33
- "The Oosumich of Open Form: Writing as Vision Quest"  
By Paul Nelson page 35
- "Is There Life After Death?": *Heaven Is Small* by Emily Schultz  
Reviewed by Eric Spalding page 36
- "New World Frontier: On Cascadian Literature": *Making Waves: Reading British Columbia and Pacific Northwest Literature*, edited by Trevor Carolan  
Reviewed by Paul Nelson page 37
- Enter the Chrysanthemum* by Fiona Tinwie Lam  
Reviewed by Frances Cabahug page 38



This issue of the  
*Pacific Rim Review of Books*  
is dedicated to the memory of  
Robert Kroetsch (1927-2011).  
Novelist, poet, critic,  
innovator and mentor.  
He will be missed.



Completed Field  
Notes  
University of  
Alberta Press



What the Crow  
Said  
University of  
Alberta Press

# "YES, HOPE IS OUR DUTY" ON WENDELL BERRY'S *LEAVINGS*

Gregory Dunne

*He wanted his body transported in the bed of a pickup truck. He wanted to be buried as soon as possible. He wanted no undertakers. No embalming, for God sake! No coffin. Just an old sleeping bag. "...Disregard all state laws concerning burial. I want my body to help fertilize the growth of a cactus or cliff rose or sagebrush or tree."*

- Doug Peacock, on funeral arrangements for Edward Abbey

I am reading in a library in Miyazaki, Japan. Latitude 31 54' 0" N and longitude 131 26' 0" E. I am sitting at a comfortable table beside a window that runs floor to ceiling. It is autumn, leaves beginning to fall. Birds leap between the branches and pick at berries. This library sits on top a hill opposite a Shinto shrine enclosed by dense forest. A glinting creek tumbles over rocks below. A quiet place – perfect habitat for reading Wendell Berry's new collection of poems.

The quotation above relates to the final wishes of the American writer Edward Abbey, with the way he wanted to be buried. In reading Berry's poems, I am reminded of Abbey, no doubt because of my recent reading of his *Desert Solitaire*. The works of these two writers share similar qualities and sensibilities: direct, matter-of-fact tone, keenness of observation and descriptive detail, and an abiding willingness to engage in political issues involving the environment.

Both Berry and Abbey celebrate place. For Berry it's a farm in Kentucky. For Abbey it's the Utah desert. "This is the most beautiful place on earth," he proclaims in the opening sentence of his celebrated book. "There are many such places. Every man, every woman, carries in heart and mind the image of the ideal place, the right place, the one true home, known or unknown, actual or visionary." Berry too sees the relationship between a person and place as a fundamental and shaping one: an in-forming influence. In the opening stanza of the long elegiac poem "The Book of Camp Branch," Berry comprehends his life in relation to the stream, Camp Branch, which runs through his property. The stream is used as a metaphor for his life. But one feels – and is meant to understand – that it is more than metaphor – it is something actual and real, a deeper correspondence, more material than theoretical or imaginary. This close association is doing the work of helping Berry understand his life more fully, to comprehend it. He recognizes the intimate relationship shared between his life and his *place* – the stream his "native descent," his "native walk", his "native thought:"

*Camp Branch, my native stream  
Forever unreturning flows  
From the town down to Cane Run  
Which flows to the river. It is  
My native descent, my native  
Walk, my native thought  
That stays and goes, passing  
Ever downward toward the sea...*



Wendell Berry

In one of the first poems of the book, Berry addresses the American poet Hayden Carruth, his recently diseased friend, and speaks of his preference for the "superficial" as opposed the world of illusion and dream:



*Leavings*  
Wendell Berry  
Counterpoint Press  
132 Pages  
\$23.00 US

**A Letter**  
(to Hayden Carruth)

*Dear Hayden,  
How good – how liberating! – to read  
Of your hatred of Alice in Wonderland.  
I used to hear my mother reading it  
To my sisters, and I hated it too,  
But have always been embarrassed  
To say so, believing that everybody else  
Loved it. But who the hell wants to go  
Down a rabbit hole? I like my feet best  
When they're walking on top of the ground.  
If I could burrow like a mole, I would  
And I would like that. I would like  
To fly like a bird, if I could. Otherwise,  
My stratum of choice is the surface.  
I prefer skin to anatomy, green grass  
To buried rocks, terra firma to the view  
From anywhere higher than a tree.  
"Long live superficiality!" say I,  
as one foot fares waywardly graveward.*

Abbey, like Berry, speaks in a similar way in his appreciation of the desert: "To me the desert is stimulating, exciting, exacting: I feel no temptation to sleep or to relax into occult dreams but rather an opposite effect which sharpens and heightens vision, touch, hearing, taste and smell. Each stone, each plant, each grain of sand exists in and for itself with a clarity that is undimmed by any suggestion of a different realm. *Claritas, integritas, veritas*. Only the sunlight holds things together. Noon is the crucial hour: the desert reveals itself nakedly and cruelly, with no meaning but its own existence... I consider the tree, the lonely cloud, the sandstone bedrock of this part of the world and pray – in my fashion – for a vision of truth. I listen for signals from the sun – but that distant music is too high and pure for the human ear. I gaze at the tree and receive no response. I scrape my bare feet against the sand and rock under the table and am comforted by their solidity and resistance." (*Desert Solitaire* 136-137.)

Berry and Abbey share a belief then that the earth below our feet and before our eyes is deserving of our fullest attention. In their vision and approach to the environment they draw influence from writers of the past, particularly H.D. Thoreau. Like Thoreau, they espouse an engaged awareness of humankind's place in relation to the natural world. The writing, thinking, and example of Henry David Thoreau are sewn into the bindings of both books. It is hard, for example, *not* to read Berry's "A Letter" and to not think of Thoreau's aphorism "speak of heaven; you disgrace earth." Both writers understand this world as, in a sense, heaven enough. When Berry writes of his own eventual demise and death in one of the most emotionally naked and searing poems in the collection, he speaks of his longing for an afterlife that might contain something of the world as he has known it: "I long / instead for the Heaven of creatures, of seasons, / of day and night. Heaven enough for me / would be this world as I know it, but redeemed / Of our abuse of it and of one another." Abbey too speaks in terms of "praise" when referring to the earth, specifically because he views the earth, replete with bounteous forms of beauty and intricate mystery as a kind of paradise: "...the paradise of which I write and wish to praise is with us yet, the here and now, the actual, tangible, dogmatically real earth on which we stand."

In this way, the work of both writers is informed by an abiding environmental ethos. In writing of the Utah desert, Abby speaks of prayer. His way of praying is individualized, something private, and yet prayer nonetheless: "I consider the tree, the lonely cloud, the sandstone bedrock of this part of the world and pray – in my fashion – for a vision of truth." When Wendell Berry titles the second section of this new collection "Sabbaths 2005 -2008," he echoes the title of his earlier collection *Sabbaths* (1995), making clear his continued interest in exploring the richly suggestive implications of this word. "Sabbath" in Berry's poetics indicates, as the epigraph to this section in the book makes clear, an interest in interrogating one singular and endlessly-

giving question: “How may a human being come to rest?”

The poems in this collection explore and press this question. Each poem may be understood as another *try* or *test*, a way of helping the writer explore the interior, exterior, and circumference of the question. The question, it is important to note, does not limit itself to some prosaic understanding of “rest.” Berry is questing after something more comprehensive, something which might be understood as an attempt to find “rest” in the design and fabric of existence, an existence dependent upon, and in relation to/with, the Creator and the created. Berry is a life-long Christian of the Baptist persuasion. His spiritual grounding is particularly significant because he uses it, or draws from it, to develop an environmental ethics that informs his poetry. When he asks, “How may a human being come to rest?” He understands the individual’s connection with the present *as well as with* the future. If we are to find rest in both the present and the future, our actions matter. They produce consequences. Returning to the discussion on the environment, Berry believes the manner in which we treat the earth, and each other, will markedly contribute to whatever quality of rest we enjoy in the present and the future. Thoreau intended something similar when he questioned whether one could “kill time... without injuring eternity.” Scott Cairns too, the contemporary American poet, makes this connection between action and time when he refers to sin as being “...not so bad / as it is a waste of time.” Berry indicates how tightly bound he sees the present with the future in poem “XIII” from the “Sabbaths” section:

### XIII

*Eternity is not infinity  
It is not a long time.  
It does not begin at the end of time.  
It does not run parallel to time.  
In its entirety it always was.  
In its entirety it will always be.  
It is entirely present always.*

“Eternity... is entirely present always.” Berry’s understanding of time – an understanding that springs from his Christian faith – informs his environmental ethics which in turn affect his art. Berry is a farmer. He has worked his family’s farm for more than forty years. His writing is famously informed by that experience. We see this reflected in his novels, essays, and poems. The fiction includes a trilogy of stories that take place in a fictionalized farming community. The essays deal with a variety of environmental concerns. In poetry too, we see the connection between his Christian faith and his environmental ethics. Simply put, the way we treat the land, the environment, is an ethical matter. To treat it in such a way as to diminish its vitality for future generations is ethically wrong, short-sighted, and self centered.

Berry’s ethics have proven challenging to some Christians who see in them a too great attachment to the earth and a failure on Berry’s part to acknowledge the world as “fallen.” In the poem below, Berry responds with wit to such accusations. The poem is worth quoting in full as it illustrates the generosity of spirit in his “theology”—how it is grounded in “honester dirt” that critically allows for humility to flourish in a manner in keeping with Christian values and virtues:

### VII.

*Having written some pages in favor of Jesus,  
I receive a solemn communication crediting me  
With the possession of a “theology” by which  
I acquire the strange dignity of being wrong  
Forever or forever right. Have I gauged exactly  
Enough the weights of sins? Have I found  
Too much of the Hereafter in the Here? Or  
The other way around? Have I found too much  
Pleasure, too much beauty and goodness, in this  
Our unreturning world? O Lord, please forgive  
Any smidgen of such distinctions I may  
Have still in my mind. I meant to leave them  
All behind a long time ago. If I’m a theologian  
I am one to the extent I have learned to duck  
When the small, haughty doctrines fly overhead,  
Dropping their loads of whitewash at random  
On the faces of those who look toward Heaven*

*Look down, look down, and save your soul  
By honest dirt, that receives with a lordly  
Indifference this off-fall of the air. Christmas  
Night and Easter morning are this soil’s only laws...*

Berry understand that much of the ongoing destruction of the planet springs in no small part from humanity’s ignorance in knowing its place in the world, its place in the design of creation, of not acknowledging limitations. Over and again, poems in this collection ask us to acknowledge limitations and to embrace them as a way of coming to know a truer home on earth: “Look down, look down, and save your soul / By honest dirt, that receives with a lordly / Indifference this off-fall of the air.”

The bulk of these new poems appear to have been written post 9/11 while the “War on Terror” was being prosecuted. One gets a sense of the elder poet’s brooding concern, disappointment, and sorrow over the United States’ military action in Iraq and Afghanistan. The small, yet ominous poem, “TU FU,” which appears early in the collection, initiates the book’s engagement with the topic of war. Berry’s engagement is ongoing throughout the book, albeit intermittent. His engagement casts its long shadow throughout the book, and sometimes it is a central, ominous concern:

### Tu Fu

*As I sit here  
In my little boat  
Tied to the shore  
Of the passing river  
In a time of ruin  
I think of you,  
Old ancestor,  
And wish you well.*

Tu Fu was a refugee, a man who lost his home and was forced to escape with his family on foot through treacherous mountains during a time of war. If Berry may be said to be about anything, he is about being rooted in place – in a home and community. The thought of being cast upon the road, of being a refugee, must rank with him as being among the worst of fates. Could it be he is feeling like a refugee? Could it be that recent political events, wars, have made this most rooted of men feel alien and disoriented in his own country? Berry suggests that this is the case. The nation has become unmoored – directionless and lost. And he, like Tu Fu, a refugee in his own land, disoriented. Two poems:

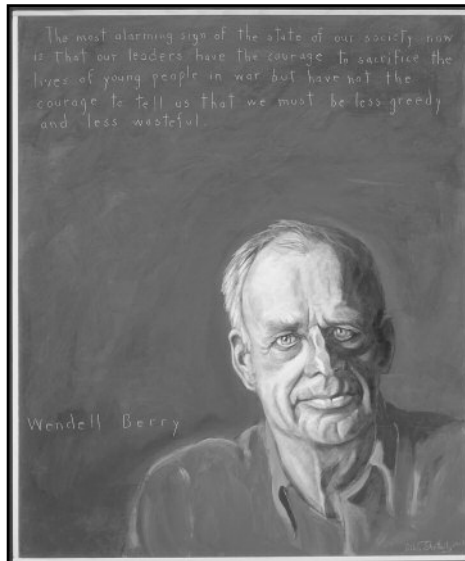
*The nation is a boat  
as some have said, ourselves  
its passengers. How troubling  
now to ride it drifting  
down the flow from the old  
high vision of dignity, freedom,  
holy writ of habeas corpus  
and the land’s abundance – down  
to waste, want, fear, tyranny,  
torture, caricature  
of vision in a characterless time,  
while the abyss whirls below.*

(“Sabbaths”, 2007, poem II)

*Before we kill another child  
For righteousness’ sake, to serve  
Some blissful killer’s sacred cause,  
Some bloody patriot’s anthem  
And his flag, let us leave forever  
Our ancestral lands, our holy books,  
Our god thoughtified to the mean  
Of our smallest selves. Let us go  
To the graveyard and lie down  
Forever among the speechless stones.*

(“Sabbaths”, 2006, poem VII)

In its unequivocal concern with environmental issues, with its concern with how



“Americans who tell the truth series: Wendell Berry,” by Robert Shetterly.

mankind might best live *at rest* within the natural order, and with its concerned engagement with issues of war and injustice, the poetry of *Leavings* stands as a further extension and elaboration upon thematic qualities that have long distinguished Berry's poetry. The tone here is noticeably different in so far as we are getting an older Berry: a grandfather now, a man genuinely aware of his aging and mortality – a wiser, older man who remains stubbornly hopeful.

In addition to the topics mentioned above, the book contains a variety of poems that touch upon topics related to grace, humility, family, old age, loss, and love. In his ability to engage such a variety of topics, Berry succeeds in broadening what the poet Edwin Muir once referred to as “the estate of poetry.” What *can't* Berry talk about in his poetry? What aspects of life are not dealt with in the poetry? In reading the poems, we feel we are in the company of a genuine man; there is an inclusive quality about them. In the first poem of the book, Berry seems to suggest his ambition to write a poetry this comprehensive:

*Suppose we did our work  
Like the snow, quietly, quietly,  
Leaving nothing out...*  
(“Like Snow”)

Although the poetry, as mentioned, engages a variety of subjects, the overwhelming tone of the book is elegiac, as the reader may grasp from the title of the collection: “*Leavings*.” The elegiac quality may be struck with a soft and glancing brush as it is in the first poem below, or it may be stuck in a more forcefully way as it is in the second poem, a poem that concerns the death of the poet's dog, Nell:

*My young grandson rides with me  
As I mow the day's first swath  
Of the hillside pasture,  
And then he rambles the woods beyond  
The field's edge, emerging  
From the trees to wave, and I wave back,*

*Remembering that I too once  
Played at a field's edge and waved  
To an old workman who went mowing by,  
Waving back to me as he passed...*

*How simple to be dead! – the only  
Simplification there is, in fact. Thoreau  
To the contrary notwithstanding.  
Nell lay in her grave utterly still  
Under the falling earth, the world  
All astir above, a million leaves  
Alive in the wind, and what do we know?*

One might expect that the poet's intimate and lifelong observation and contact with nature, of its cycles and rhythms, would bring some measure of solace in the face of old age and death, and it does to some degree, but the an all pervading and satisfying measure of solace and understanding in the face of mortality is not something that Berry enjoys. He knows death is part of the natural cycle and yet admits to his human limitation in knowing much beyond that. The attitude, disposition, or response that Berry adopts to mortality comes to him through his Christian faith. In a word, it is *hope*. Hope is of fundamental importance here. And it rings consonant with his belief that humankind should accept its limitations and in so doing come to truer accord with the environment: “Look down, look down, and save your soul.”

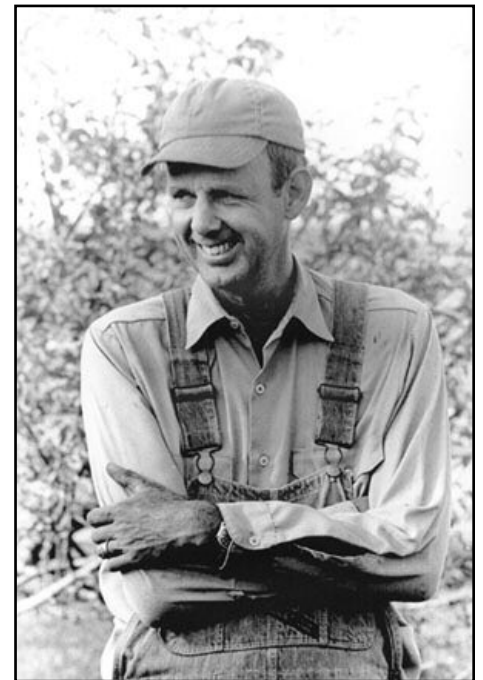
Berry's emphasis on hope locates him in a place where he doesn't *need* to know everything. In this sense – in the sense that it locates him in a place where he is free from having to know – one might say, it releases him into a location of rest. Still, it is a humbling place for it acknowledges limitations and dependency – humankind can not ultimately explain life or death. We can, of course, say “There's no sense to it. No meaning.” But this does not *explain* it. We are dependent on something beyond our own reasoning to explain life in this sense. To live with an attitude of hope suggests the need for humility in the face of the unknowable, but it also, and this is important, suggests an attitude towards life that is clarifying. It is clarifying because it allows us to see the world in correct relation/proportion to our place within it. It provides something like the corrected lenses by which we can better understand our intricate and interdependent relationship with the planet:

*Only low in the land does*

*The water flow. It goes  
To seek the level that is lowest,  
The silence that gathers  
Many songs, the darkness  
Made of many lights,  
And then by the sun is raised  
Again into the air...*  
(from “The Book of Camp Branch”)

This attitude of hope also provides a place out of which real spiritual practice for Berry can issue. As he states at the beginning of poem III in the “Sabbath 2007” section, “Yes... Hope is our duty.” Despite his concerns about the degradation of the environment, warfare, social injustice, and the “unreturning,” hope gives him a tangible active method by which he can circumvent paralysis and despair and responsibly respond. He can act – it's his “duty.” In Berry's poetry, hope takes on great vigor for these reasons. It is a quiet, lowly word; exactly the word that a poet like Berry would understand to be multi-valent, resonant: a word capable of welcoming the future:

*In time a man disappears  
From his lifelong fields...  
Thinking of this, he seems to  
Miss himself in those places  
As if always he has been there,  
Watching for himself to return.  
But first he must disappear,  
And this he foresees with hope,  
With thanks. Let others come.*



Wendell Berry

Wendell Berry eulogized Edward Abbey at a memorial ceremony held some months after Edward Abbey's body was taken out into the desert by his close friends and buried in accord with Abbey's wishes. I hadn't known this until I went online and looked up information on Abbey. It was surprising to discover that although these men shared a strong friendship they never actually met. Their friendship had grown out of mutual admiration and respect, out of the exchange of letters, and the sharing of books.

Reading Berry, all afternoon I am reminded of Abbey. Here is the poem Berry recited in his eulogy for Ed Abbey at the memorial service:

*The old oak wears new leaves.  
It stands for many lives.  
Within its veil of green  
A singer sings unseen.  
Again the living come  
To light, and are at home.  
And Edward Abbey's gone...*

*I think of that dead friend  
Here where he never came  
Except by thought and name:  
I praise the joyous rage  
That justified his page  
He would have like this place  
Where spring returns with solace  
Of bloom in a dark time,  
Larkspur and columbine.  
The flute song of the thrush  
Sounds in the underbrush.*

I am struck by the poignancy of the poem, by how it brings Abbey to Berry's place in Kentucky, his family farm. I am struck with how the poem, in its own way, honors the wishes of Edward Abbey. Abbey's final wishes are notable for their sense of fun and humility; he speaks in terms of being transported in the bed of a pickup truck

(continued on page 33)



# “JUST LIKE A ROLLIN’ STONE”

Joseph Blake

Rock and roll outlaw Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones has produced an honest, rollicking, detailed and surprisingly moving autobiography. With the editorial aid of James Fox, whose own *White Mischief* was an acclaimed record of hedonistic British nobility, Richards has written a smart, incisive narrative. It’s a “take it or leave it” telling, ripe with bawdy, caustic wit and brutal honesty.

In a conversational, albeit profane, literary voice, the musician traces his love of music back to a council estate boyhood and through a long, enduring love affair with the blues. A shared love of blues birthed the Rolling Stones. It’s a bond that still links Richards and his writing partner, Mick Jagger, who Richards often refers to as Brenda in his bitchy, gossipy recollections.

Richards uses his diaries, letters, notebooks, as well as the reminiscences of other participants to sketch bawdy tales of sex, drugs and rock and roll. It’s funny, in places introspective, and told in a spare, confident voice. It’s a joy to read. Richards spends a lot of his book describing and reflecting upon his drug usage, a habit that landed him at the top of British music publication *New Music Express*’ list of musicians “most likely to die” for a decade.

“It’s not only to the high quality of drugs I had that I attribute my survival. I was very meticulous about how much I took,” Richards explains. “I’d never put more in to get a little higher. That’s where most people fuck up on drugs. It’s the greed involved that never really affected me. People think once they’ve got this high, if they take some more they’re going to get a little higher. There’s no such thing. Especially with cocaine.” Except for a short spell at the bottom of the heroin ladder shooting “Mexican shoe scrapings” with Gram Parsons, Richards enjoyed pharmaceutical-quality drugs. Early in his habit, he bought from Britain’s National Health-registered junkies. Later, he describes a nine-day binge (his personal record) without sleep while recording rock masterpieces during all-night sessions.

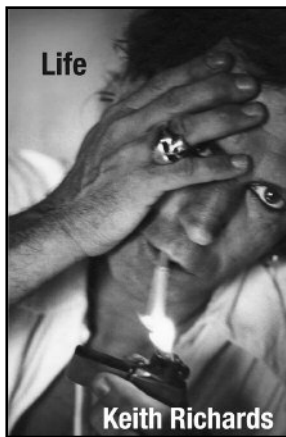
Richards also notes the horror of the apomorphine cure, a cold turkey treatment complete with sadistic nurse introduced to the musician by William Burroughs. Parsons and Richards briefly kicked their habits “with a bucket to throw up in, if you could stop twitching for enough seconds to get near it.” Better than the harrowing tales of police, prison time, addiction, and death is Richards’ depiction of making music. You don’t have to be a guitarist to gain insight from the musician’s straight-talking description of his great discovery: five string open-G tuning derived from banjo tunings from the rural south and introduced to Richards by slide guitarist Ry Cooder. Removing the big, bottom string on the guitar, the sounds drone and resonance is central to Richards’ guitar playing.

“Logically it shouldn’t work, but when you play it, and that note keeps ringing even though you’ve now changed to another chord, you realize that that is the root note of the whole thing you’re trying to do. It’s the drone.”

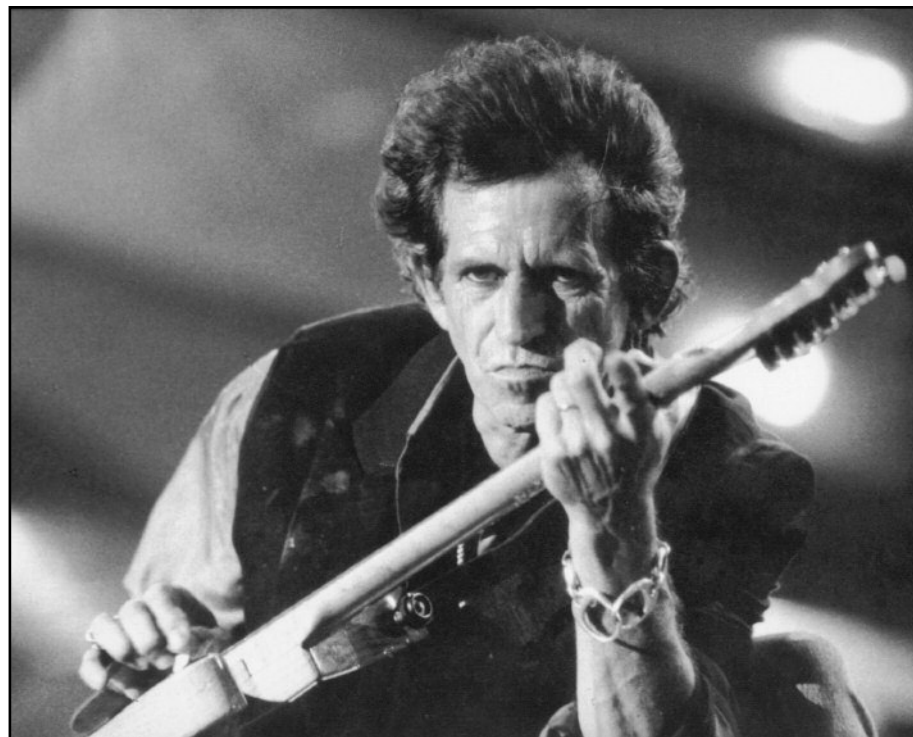
Richards goes on to connect West African music, Don Everly’s open G tuning, Mozart and Vivaldi, and train rhythms, adding “Five strings cleared out the clutter. It gave me the licks and laid on the textures.”

The guitarist’s classic riffs and spare lyrical ideas are completed by Jagger’s editorial additions in Keef’s telling of the Jagger-Richards collaboration. He makes a pretty strong case for his importance to the duo’s creations, while describing the long friendship’s strains, estrangements and partial reconciliation. He has a healthy respect for the Stones’ historical importance, as well as its debt to previous forms and masters of the blues.

“When we put out “Little Red Rooster”, a raw Willie Dixon blues with slide guitar and all, it was a daring move at the time, November 1964. We were getting no-no’s from the record company, management, everyone else. But we felt we were on the crest of a wave and we could push it. It was almost defiance of pop,” Richards writes. “In our arrogance at the time, we wanted to make a statement. *I’m a little red rooster/too lazy to crow for day.* See if you can get that to the top of the charts, mother-fucker. Song about a chicken. Mick and I stood up and said, come on, let’s push it. This is what we’re fucking about. And the floodgates burst after that, suddenly Muddy



*Life*  
Keith Richards  
Little Brown. 564 p.,  
cloth, \$33.99



Keith Richards

and Howlin’ Wolf and Buddy Guy were getting gigs and working. It was a breakthrough. And the record got to number one. I’m absolutely sure what we were doing made Berry Gordy at Motown capable of pushing his stuff elsewhere, and it certainly rejuvenated Chicago blues as well.”

Near the end of his raw narrative from inside the rock and roll crossfire hurricane of the transformational 1960s and ’70s, Richards’ passion for black music takes him to Jamaica, reggae music, and the hypnotic drum rhythms of Rastafarianism. This leads to his work with the Wingless Angels, his own band the XPensive Winos, and a home in the Caribbean. His accident in Fiji where he nearly died from falling out of a tree in 2006 is detailed with panache: the New Zealand brain surgeon who operated on him had lionized Richards from his boyhood years. The book notes get-well messages from fans including Jerry Lee Lewis, Willie Nelson, Bill Clinton and Tony Blair, who wrote, “Dear Keith, You’ve always been one of my heroes.” Married to a Staten Island-bred model and a self-described family man clean of a serious drug habit for two decades, the 66-year old Richards includes a recipe for bangers and mash, as well as advice on how to use a knife in a street-fight in this sprawling autobiography of a life fully lived. With his Prince of Darkness long hours, Richards must be at least one hundred in normal human years, and this autobiography gathers a lot of great stories. As he writes on the dust jacket, “This is the life. Believe it or not I haven’t forgotten any of it.”

Joseph Blake is Music Editor for PRRB.

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# WHEN THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD WAS ITALIAN

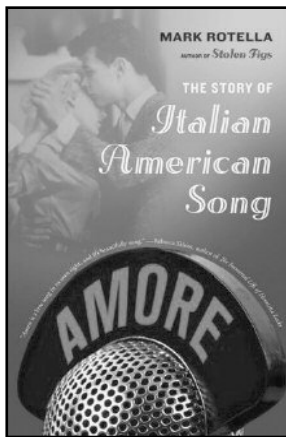
Joseph Blake

Mark Rotella's *Amore* is a loving celebration of the last century of Italian-American song. An informal, chatty, labour of love, *Amore* grew out of his wife's battle with cancer and his favourite music's role in her survival. Rotella found the romantic optimism of popular Italian-American crooners the perfect soundtrack for his wife's healing. He wrote this breezy, little book to document that soundtrack.

*Amore* has a chronological structure based on the songs. It begins with a description of *O Marennariello* (*The Sailor*), a nineteenth century Neapolitan tune that eventually evolved into *I Have But One Heart*, a hit for both Frank Sinatra and Vic Damone in 1947.

In another early chapter on Enrico Caruso's *Vesti la giubba* the author begins, "America's first pop music star was an Italian opera singer." Rotella explains how Caruso's 1907 million-selling version of this aria from the opera *Paglicacci* established how records were bought, when Caruso's millions of 78 RPM recordings wiped out the turn of the century competition, the wax cylinder form of recording.

The author describes the southern Italian demographic that came to the United States, the influence of village life in the new world, and the prejudice that Italian immigrants faced. Rotella celebrates a broad range of Italian-American culture from sports heroes like Joe Dimaggio to the role of Italian-American bricklayers. He also delves into the anti-immigrant laws and the Mafia, but most of his anecdote-ripe chapters are the result of six years of interviews with his much-loved singers, their families and management. As Rotella writes about the snapshot descriptions in *Amore*, "I was looking for their inspiration, their culture, how they ate, how they grew up."



*Amore: the Story of Italian American Song*  
Mark Rotella  
FSG, 2010  
\$32.00



Frank Sinatra

Italian American singer. Sinatra's unique style, as described by Rotella combines jazz influences from singers like Billie Holiday with *bel canto* singing style from eighteenth century Italian opera and the romanticism of Italian folk songs. These folk songs, children's songs and wedding songs were also the inspiration for numerous novelty hits by other Italian-American singers in the 1950s. Caruso's *bel canto* arias inspired Elvis Presley's songs like *It's Now or Never*, which was based on Caruso's recording of *O Sole Mio*. Elvis also acknowledged Dean Martin as another hero. Martin's cocktail-in-hand cool and *la sprezzatura*, or making hard work look easy, inspired a generation of hipsters.



Tony Bennett

"It was Italian-Americans who gave style to pop music in the 1950s," Rotella writes. "They had a certain smoothness and a little bit of attitude... There was a very vibrant feel to the music." In another section of the book he calls the singers "cocky and tender, tough and vulnerable, serious and playful, forward thinking and nostalgic."

Like his musical heroes, Rotella is nostalgic, but he is not forward thinking. He doesn't even seem to think much about the last few decades. Songs by Connie Francis, Bobby Darin, Lou Christie, Dion and the Belmonts, and Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons get their own chapters, but a host of Italian American doo-wop groups as well as Frankie Avalon, Fabian, Bobby Rydell and other manufactured 1960s teen idols get scant mention. Frank Zappa, Bruce Springsteen, Jon Bon Jovi, Madonna and Lady Gaga are Italian-American singers and musicians who get even less appreciation. Those oversights and slights aside, Rotella has written a charming book about a culture he obviously loves, describing its evolution from the streets and opera houses of southern Italy to the jukeboxes and radios, bars, casinos and theatres of North America. It's a good read and a handy resource for any music fan.

Joseph Blake is Music Editor for PRRB.



Dean Martin

At the heart of *Amore* is the decade between the end of World War II and the rise of the Beatles. Although he introduces seminal Italian-American stars like Nick Lucas, who was also America's first star guitarist in the mid-1920's, much of *Amore* focuses on the pop triumphs of Frank Sinatra, Vic Damone, Louis Prima, Perry Como, Tony Bennett, Frankie Laine, Dean Martin, Al Martino and Jerry Vale. He introduces Italian-American cultural icons like Lou Monte and Russ Columbo as well as lesser known vocalists like Alan Dale, Johnny Desmond and Joni James.

Many of these singers anglicized their names to avoid anti-Italian prejudice. Vito Farinola became Vic Damone; Francesco LoVocchio became Frankie Laine; Anthony Benedetto became Tony Bennett; Dino Crocetti became Dean Martin. Frank Sinatra did not change his name, but he is arguably the most famous and most successful

# THE ART OF BREATHING UNDERWATER

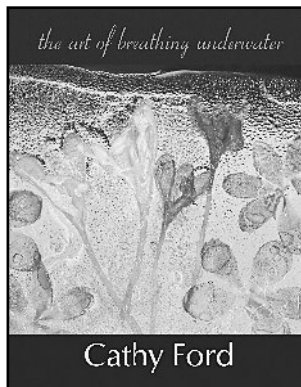
*Ali Siemens*

A veteran Canadian poet, Cathy Ford is the author of many works. Amazingly, *the art of breathing underwater* is her first full-length collection in twenty-one years, yet it's clear that she is still acutely aware of how to create poems that extract emotions which are often tucked away.

Ford's new poetry is powerful, yet delicate. Divided into three sections it begins with "women and children" and moves on to speak of women who have helped change the literary and cultural world for all women: Emily Brontë, Gertrude Stein, Georgia O'Keefe and Virginia Woolf. While these women often represent power and perseverance, Ford reminds the readers how delicate life is. In a piece entitled "wallpaper, or forced perspective, once altered: your name here," she reminds us how female literary figures throughout the ages have attempted to teach readers how to breathe. Ford's poetry outlines the graces of women and all that they bring to the world, celebrating their gender and the gifts they provide. In the same poem, she provides a disturbing image of two dead children, followed with, "it is astonishing what survives after what kills you."

While life presents its challenges on a regular basis, Ford asks the reader to pause, breathe, and then continue on while looking at life as more than an obstacle. She reminds her readers that although breathing is second nature, it is often beneficial to focus on the act of breathing itself.

In the second section, "Stillwater, Spillgate," Ford changes the style of her poems by melding the topics of women, nature, and men all together. Without titles, each poem brings the reader a quick breath of air before submersing again. "Stillwater, Spillgate," seems to have a body of water running through each of its pages, saturating all of the work. Ford's style allows for the poems to be read in a natural ebb and flow,



*The Art of Breathing Underwater*  
Cathy Ford  
Photos by Janet Dwyer  
Mother Tongue, 2010  
114 pp. \$19.95

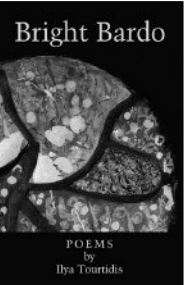
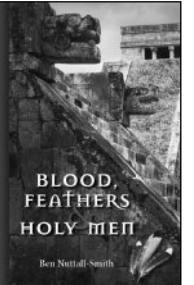
but just as water moves gracefully, Ford technique reminds us that she is not only talking about the beauty of nature. Like the swift change in the movement of tides, Ford chooses specific words that keep the reader anxiously awaiting the upcoming chain of events. Whether Ford is writing in a romantic or serious voice, she carries her reader through her poetry with a steady rhythm. In her one poem in book two she writes, "if the birds die, the whales/ it's not safe for humans, the bees/ oh please do not obliterate my heart with the all-too obvious." Here, Ford uses natural imagery in talking about the extinction of three animals and pairs the topic with her heart. Instead of long lines of poetry, her simple and short lines carry a powerful rhythm.



*Cathy Ford*

Her third section, "lifelines, or the little black dress poems," unravels the different situations that woman reflect on. In "Passionfruit, or peregrinations" she says, "if you do anything to anything, it changes" (89). Whether she is talking about the power of women and feminism, nature's strength, or relationships, certain information is as essential as a little black dress. Like the little black dress all women should own, reading Ford's poetry makes its way into the same category. Ford doesn't sugar-coat her knowledge; rather, she eloquently displays truth on each page, engulfing heart and soul. You may take a big breath when you begin reading her poetry, but don't worry about suffocation; Ford makes the art of breathing easy.

*Ali Siemens writes from B.C.'s Fraser Valley.*

						
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# WHAT WE MISS

## LINDA ROGERS TALKS TO GLEN SORESTAD ABOUT HIS NEW BOOK AND HIS LIFE IN POETRY

It usually takes generations of cultural memory to create a poet like Glen Sorestad, but the recent Member of The Order of Canada has neatly fit his mountain socks inside a farmer's boots. Even though he was born in Vancouver, on the West Coast of Canada, it is a prairie wind that moves through the polymath who has devoted many years to teaching and publishing literary books at Thistledown Press.

The poems in *what we miss*, the latest of twenty volumes, could not have been written anywhere but Saskatchewan, where Sorestad was, from the years 2000 to 2004, the poet laureate. The prairie dictates a pragmatic approach, one finger held up to the wind. Its poets listen for the weather, for the migration of birds, for the path of the sun to determine the arrangement of words on a page.

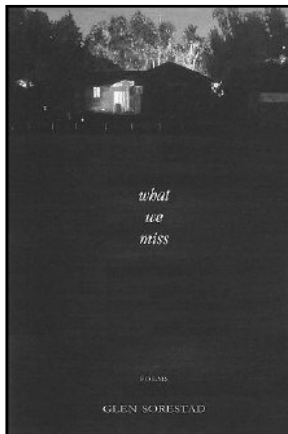
*I was ten when I moved with my parents to Saskatchewan to the very rural area where both of my parents had grown up. By the time I graduated from high school at seventeen and was on my own, I thought of myself very much as a prairie boy – not that my earlier childhood had vanished. But those years from ten to seventeen, very important in a boy's life, were obviously so prairie/rural that no one would have had reason to suggest that I wasn't prairie through and through. I was at home in the boundless landscape just as I had accustomed to an extreme climate. Much of my earliest writing is overtly prairie-oriented in so many respects that it almost seems amusing to me now. But I realized, long after I began writing seriously, how profoundly I was influenced by Anne Marriot's poem, "The Wind Our Enemy" and in some respects my early poetry was unknowingly paying homage to Marriot.*

*But as I wrote more and experienced life in so many different places and parts of the world, I found myself realizing, more and more, that there is a part of me that still is very much in tune with a small section of Vancouver and of Burnaby. This re-surfaces at various times, increasingly, in my writing, as memory takes me back to moments of my pre-teen childhood years. Though I am in my seventies now, I have come to appreciate that there is one-seventh of me that is undeniably West Coast. I can call myself a true-blue, hardcore flatlander, but it can never be entirely true. One reading my poetry from beginning to end – heaven forbid that anyone should feel so compelled – would also find that the poetry discloses this chunk of West Coast in me that can not be denied and that will have its say from time to time in my writing. Just this past January in Cuba, I wrote two poems that are a good illustration of this. Here's one:*

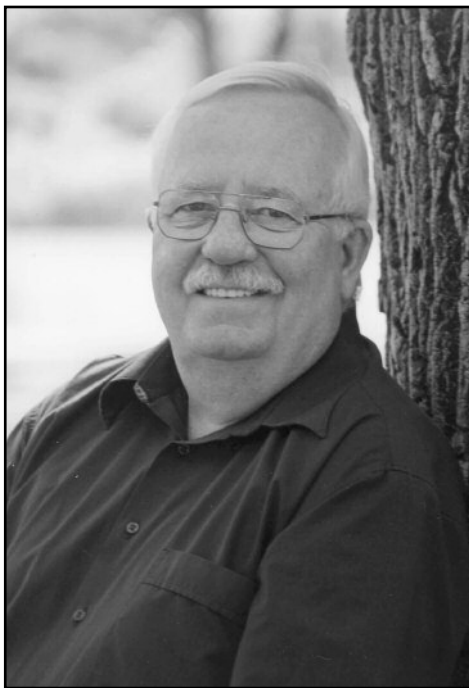
### Vancouver, 1942

*One part of his childhood he remembers by the doors.*

*The front door opened on a loud, bold world of rattling streetcars and growling autos, cement sidewalks*



*what we miss*  
Glen Sorestad,  
Thistledown Press, 2010



Glen Sorestad

*and brooding black lamp posts;*

*the back door opened on a quiet green space, tiny and tidy with shrubs and flowers, a walkway leading to a gate to the back alley.*

*Visitors rang the doorbell, entered from the street, all smiles and laughter.*

*People who knocked at the back door never came into the house. These were silent Japanese fishermen, carrying wicker baskets of fresh Pacific salmon they sold to my mother.*

Unlike fellow Saskatoon poet Anne Szumigalski, who was of the enclosed garden rather than the far horizon, who always heard piano music over the sound of birds and wind in the grass, always quintessentially English, Sorestad became a man of the New World Steppes, his sensibility practical, his mysteries as simple and complicated as the seeds produced by grain.

*Here in Saskatchewan we learn to hold our tongues.*

At the end of the day, a good teacher has made a great cultural contribution. But still the muse teases a poet in those minutes before sleep. Sometimes they are filled with regret. Sorestad explains how he has found the balance in his life and work.

*There is no question for me that because teaching, at least for the good teacher, is a very intense creative activity, this means that there is very little left in the creative fuel tank, either at day's end or by week's end. I've truly admired those notable teachers who somehow managed to accomplish significant writing while teaching full-time because I found this impossible to do while I was teaching English and working late in the evenings either reading student writing or preparing lessons. To balance teaching and writing at the same time with any success requires, it seems to me, a degree of self-discipline and time management that escaped me.*

*Alistair Macleod once told me that if he managed to finish a single short story during an academic year, he considered that great because most of his writing was done after the academic year at his summer home on Cape Breton Island.*

*I did find though that there were times when I managed to write poems that emerged out of writing-centered discussions in the classroom. As well, when I taught Creative Writing classes and the students were writing, I also would write, occasionally generating work that found its way home and into my poetry folders for later rewriting.*

Having been a teacher and writer all these years, Sorestad witnessed the arc, where poetry may have changed from "calling" to "career" as more and more students have studied writing as an academic discipline. Now we have formalism and a technique focused criticism. Is this good for poetry or does it remove it to the ivory towers where it is not as generally accessible or as vital? He answers:

*There is a certain element of the double-edged sword in the 20<sup>th</sup> century's phenomenon of "writing factories" and their churning out of writers, graduating into an apparently shrinking market place for writing. On the one hand, it's hard to argue that having more writers is a negative thing. Having more people writing poetry should be seen as encouraging.*

*However, there is some tendency for these writing factories to turn out academics more interested in finding a position teaching writing than in the actual writing itself. As*

well, there may be a tendency for the writers coming out of a particular writing school to reflect the academic bent or writing biases of the faculty of that school and to perpetuate this approach to writing wherever they assume faculty positions. I have some concern that writers groomed in academic writing programs are being removed more and more from the ordinary poetry reader, however we might define such a beast, or if indeed there are any such persons left, so that poetry eventually becomes academically-motivated poets writing for other academic poets. In fact, there may already exist an overall sense or feeling within the greater public that poetry has become a form of reading for only a select audience that does not include themselves. One might make a solid argument that contemporary poetry has already become inaccessible to most readers and this, from my perspective, is a tragedy.

Academization of our literature is only one of many new challenges. Recently, writers have faced explicit hostility from our governments at both the federal and provincial level. This attitude perpetuates the privileged position of academics working inside the sphere of entitlement. Our government has honoured Glen Sorestad, but he can't fail to have missed that cultural starvation has recently been legislated from the top down. Like Seamus Heaney who said that a poet's job is to help us endure, a process well known to cultural workers who accept that adversity is the norm for creative artists, he writes:

*One thing I have come to believe is this: no matter how hostile the political climate of the day, no government will successfully kill literary publishing in this or any country. Literature will triumph over the most insidious forms of government, just as it always has. And just as long as there are writers to write and readers who want and are able to read. Heaney is right, of course. As was Faulkner, who avowed a similar responsibility. Writers and publishers work together towards that end of helping humanity endure.*

Another head of the serpent is the proliferation of writing competitions, which swell the hungry coffers of literary magazines and the heads of successful candidates. Sorestad has strong opinions about the reduction of poetry to business. When some poets are singled out for honours, does it exalt the calling?

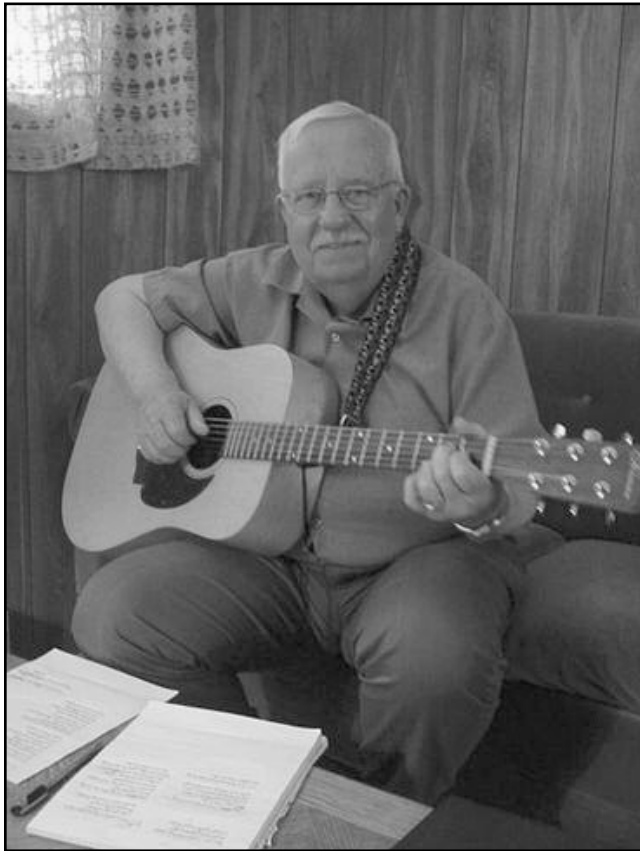
*I am adamantly non-competitive when it comes to poetry and I have always been extremely uneasy with the persistence of poetry competitions that treat poems as if they were fruit or vegetables to be judged for ribbons at the fall fair. I know there are all sorts of good reasons for poetry competitions and the deplorable fact of poets' lives is that these competitions offer one of the few potential sources of income there are for poets. However, I have avoided them on principle and continue to do so.*

Honours granted to poets are a form of recognition both to the poet as an individual and to all poets and poetry. This is especially true of the naming of Poets Laureate. Most honours represent recognition of a lifetime or considerable body of poetry as opposed to an individual poem singled out from a host of other poems. If this were a perfect world, there would be far more kinds of recognition of significant poetic careers here in Canada. There would be poets laureate in every province, in every city; there would be honorary poetry chairs in every university. And there would be reasonable recompense attached to these positions. Do you realize that in Norway, writers who have achieved notable publishing records may be granted annual living stipends for life? I know this as fact because my Norwegian poet colleague, Arne Ruse, received this lifetime grant several years ago. In Canada the equivalent would be like having a senior writing grant every year for the rest of your life.

One of the intangible perks of getting older, of surviving employment and child-raising, is that alongside certain lamentable physical restrictions comes a greater freedom of the mind. Sorestad celebrates that luxury.

*When I gave up teaching in 1981 I was certainly able to write more frequently than I did when I was in the classroom. But then the never-ending demands of running a small press began to eat into the writing time, until I finally had to give that up as well in 2000. So, now I'm free to write and I do. However, I can only say one thing with any certainty about this freedom. Since I have been able to devote myself solely to my writing, I revise and rewrite much more because now, at last, I have the time to do this. Hopefully, this results in poetry that is more complete, more honed. The question of quality is not mine to pass judgment on.*

*Another side of this question occurs to me. If a poet has no other responsibility but to write, the muse is there, the writer becomes prolific, is this necessarily a good thing? Surely the number of poems published is not the measure of the poet, or are we simply word-birders with life lists?*



Glen Sorestad

*what we miss is a mature book, the circle of birth copulation and death completed and assessed with a certain objectivity. Unlike a younger romantic poet, Sorestad steps back as if from a house with lights on at night and looks in the windows without regret. This is the natural order of things.*

In some ways, his title is a paradox. The mature poet misses nothing, because even as memory fades, the images endure in poems that capture a time and place that might otherwise be lost.

Sorestad is of the generation that moved from survival to civility, or so we thought. These poems are saturated with the unspoken irony of progress that only takes us to the realization of what we have left behind, the innocence of before. He celebrates the patterns of bird migration and the silence of snow. Silence, the new luxury, is felt between lines as spare as an economy of wings.

In the beginning "when he dreamed of flying" and in the end, there is death, as a "child is consigned to cold and dimming light," and renewal – maybe. Gently, a man whose ancestors lived in harmony with the life cycles of the earth reminds us that we are out of sync with its rhythms.

When asked about the poet's public responsibility to adjust those rhythms, he responded:

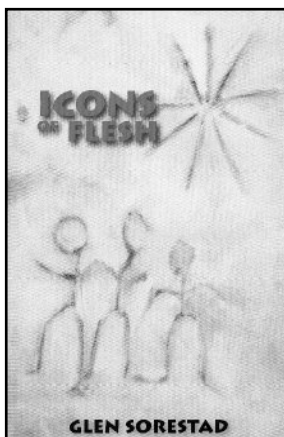
*I have never spent much time concerning myself with what may or may not be considered to be the public responsibility of the poet, other than to write poems. I see my only responsibility as a poet as telling the truth. I have always believed that poetry is an intensely private act/art in which the poet through language seeks to explore and convey to the reader the ever-changing and chaotic world that whirls about him or her in an attempt to gain a measure of understanding, some way of coming to terms with the unthinkable, unspeakable and the bizarre that is our world, while at the same time not losing sight of the beauty that still exists within the violence and terror around us.*

*The poet shares with readers whatever insights he or she may experience. If I am being honest with myself in these poetic explorations and ponderings, then I am satisfied that I owe society nothing more.*

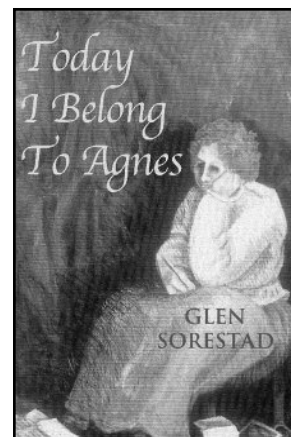
*I suppose I am a public poet because I assume, when I am writing, that I am writing for a reader, eventually. But not all of what I write will become public, of course. Some poems are not good enough and many disappear, never to be seen again, not even in my archives. A few poems, written in a pique of imagined injury, or personal disenchantment with someone, seldom survive beyond the first draft. These are destroyed and forgotten, simply because I don't believe in poetry as a weapon to be used against others. Thankfully, I can honestly say that most of the poems that have fallen by the wayside are failed poems for various reasons that doomed them to the trash basket or the delete bin.*

Ideally the aging brain deletes what it does not need and selects what is important for archival importance. Along the road to forgetting and perhaps invisibility as a man and a species, Sorestad celebrates the phenomenal world full of sensory delight, the rich scents of a barn in winter,

(continued on page 20)



Icons of Flesh



Today I Belong to Agnes

# MENDING THE UNMENDABLE

Micheline Soong

What first catches your eye when you pick up this book is how unconventional it is. The front and back covers are unattached to each other with the pages in a single accordion fold, so that if you open it up and stretch it out, you see that the pages are one long sheet folded back and forth attached to the separate front and back covers. Then you notice that there is a single sheet of paper with artwork printed on two sides sandwiched between two sheets of translucent paper. On one side, one sheet of translucent paper is printed in Japanese, and on the other side, the second sheet is printed in English. Delicately, the image of the wood-block print artwork dominated by hues of blues and green dotted by white drops by Keiko Hara emerges beneath the printed words in Japanese and English.

The architecture of this book, melding the typography of Maki Yamashita and the guidance of master book-binder Atsuo Ikuta, is the perfect setting for the coming together of two remarkably accomplished women, from different cultures, different lives, and different worlds, for an intimate conversation in twelve brief pages. One is an award-winning poet and writer who survives her husband, an even more famous writer. The other, is an award-winning novelist, divorced, and now a Buddhist nun who is currently drawn back into the limelight for her new translation of Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji*. Who they are on paper based on their credentials and c.v.s all falls away the moment you begin reading.

The reader is drawn immediately drawn into the genuine connection that Jakuchō Setouchi and Tess Gallagher make with each other. Gallagher reveals the pain she feels grieving the recent loss of her beloved husband, Raymond Carver. Setouchi responds with gentle compassion and keen understanding: "Of all the numerous pains in this world, the most painful agony is to part from your beloved. You can hardly heal



*Words Like Distant Rain: A Conversation Between Jakuchō Setouchi and Tess Gallagher*  
Eastern Washington University Press, 2006.

the sorrow of parting." When Gallagher responds wordlessly with tears welling in her eyes, Setouchi's tone imperceptibly shifts from someone speaking from a place of authority to one who shares this particular experience of intense pain: "[*taking Gallagher's hands, her voice also choked with tears*] But time is very tender. Time and tide will ease our pain, little by little. All we can do for that is just pray..."

The conversation alights on various topics that provide the reader with a voyeuristic thrill of insight—how each woman has dealt with a love, a rival, and loss, as a wife and as a mistress, to Buddhist ideas of the journey between *edo*, the present world of this life "full of pain and defilement," and passing into the next realm of existence, *jōdo*, "The Pure Land" which is free from pain", to nuts and bolts questions about each other's writing projects—inspirations, muses, themes, and the role of writing in coping with grief.

The intersection of cultures and life experiences by these two women is foregrounded by the tangible artifact that the book reads in both directions in the two distinct languages spoken by each woman. The artistry of the book is evident in the seamlessness of the conversation—the reader is oblivious to the multiple layers of mediation, requiring the services of a translator for both women—Jakuchō's responses are direct, warm, and fluid, as if these women knew and understood each other intimately, and immediately, so natural. A recommended read if you want to be taken on a journey without ever having to cross your threshold.



Jakuchō Setouchi

Micheline Soong writes from Honolulu where she teaches World Literature at Hawaii-Pacific University.

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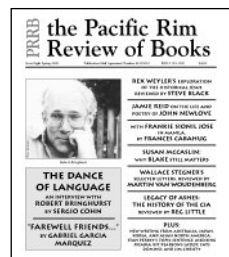
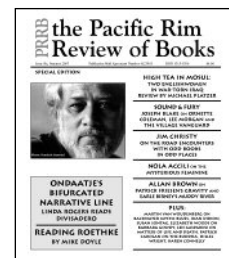
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# SEX SHAMAN

Linda Rogers



**Red Erotic: Indigenous Erotica in Pictures and Words**

Janet Rogers  
jistah publishing, 2010

I have no idea where it comes from. The English, masters of cultural prostration, cleverly asserted the purity of white (“the white radiance of eternity”) with a rainbow of Other Names for the others, lower case peoples labeled with collective colour nouns: red, yellow, brown, black, and green, of course, for extra-terrestrials.

“Red” is at once ironic and emblematic of the fire still burning in the belly of a phoenix destined to rise out of the ashes of colonialism.

Like the great visual satirist, Kent Monkman, who integrates every stereotype about “Red Indians” in classically erotic paintings that are more polemic than pornographic, Janet Rogers dares to make sacred art out of *injun* shibboleths. Her incantory poems, written for performance as much as for the page, assert the right of Wild Woman, who appears in the cover image as a mask on a pulchritudinous shape, to own her sexuality. Wild Woman may gather the children of those who squander innocence in her basket but there is no

doubt of her critical function in the survival of a culture.

Rogers, who, with this inaugural book, is now a publisher in addition to being a poet, fiction writer, lyricist, broadcaster and visual artist, has created the *jistah* imprint in order to present First Nations artists and writers to a wider audience. The beautifully produced *Red Erotic* is a bold first stroke that, in poems that assert the sensuality of women who are sometimes perceived as the passive aspect of a passive people, makes a covenant with her fellow artists to take back the most primal level of political discourse.

Red indeed. Rogers fights fire with fire. Red is, across cultures, the colour of power and prosperity, even good luck. It is the breath of the dragon that contains the windows of prophecy, asserting that her people will persevere under and over the blanket, in spite of those that brought plague but failed to kill the spirit of the founding peoples.

These poems give back the previously infected blankets. They have been laundered and folded. Wild Woman is now immune.

The centerfolds in Rogers’ ritual book, strong pieces by artists Lee Claremont, George Littlechild, Denesee Jessee Grey Paul, Lindsay Delaronde, Elizabeth Dion, Chris Bose, Marcus Amerman and Adema Agard, attest that sensuality is power. No one lies down in these paintings and photographs. No one lies down in the verse. This is stand up art. The missionary position is dead.



Janet Rogers

Janet Rogers has a shamanistic presence. She is intelligent and gifted, and her stage persona is inclusive. Her ritualized performance pieces, memorably one that uses candles and honey which might in the hands of less dignified orator come off as self-indulgent, play on the strengths of the performer and a culture which has endured because of adherence to custom and respect for the power of ritual art, “I’ll feed to you a bowl of berries/ and sing to you old songs.”

Blowing away decades of shame in sensuality, the reticence shaped by guilt, her poems take back the power.

*I’m calling your name  
I’m taking all the labels, honey, sweetie, baby  
and tucking them under the mattress  
with inhibitions and shame*

Designed to transcend the newspaper photographs of priests led to courtrooms in handcuffs, these poems and illustrations are an assertion of the strength of a love, man-to-man, woman-to-woman, man to woman, woman to child that cannot be desecrated. Marking, with their humanity, the distinct boundary between erotica and pornography, they are spells.

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

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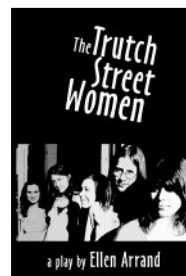
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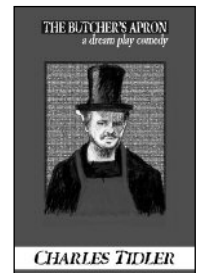
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(drama) 18.95  
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# GHOSTMASTERS

JoAnn Dionne

Mani Rao is a friend of mine. In the interest of full disclosure, I should tell you this: I was visiting Mani at her apartment in Bangalore, India, when I first read *Ghostmasters*.

It was January, 2010, a few months before the book's publication. Each day after a delicious, homemade vegetarian lunch — Mani's lemon rice was my favourite — we would settle in for a quiet afternoon. She would sit in her Spartan, roomy office replying to emails from her publisher in Hong Kong, going over images for the cover art or studying Sanskrit. I would sit out on the sun-warmed patio, a cup of tea by my side, a stack of papers — the manuscript for *Ghostmasters* — on my lap.

When an image, a line, a phrase delighted or inspired me, I would leap up and open the screen door. "I love this!" I would say, quoting her own words back to her. She would chuckle. "You should review my book!"

So here we go.

*Ghostmasters* opens with "So That You Know", when:

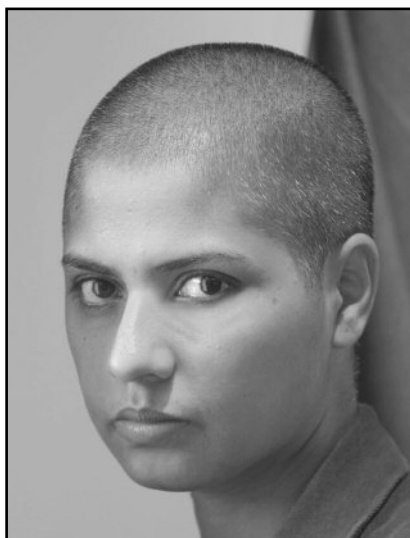
*It may be early unlit but the birds have begun to boil  
buds are growing wings and the tree will rise featherborne*

introducing imagery and a theme that recurs throughout the book: the tensions between flight and rootedness, freedom and love — and the longing for both. Though a flock of birds may "turn like a wheel and then somersault" through the heavens, they are still "Chirping chandeliers" that "will swing in from the sky in time for dusk".

The second poem, "Epitaph", offers a final word on the end of a marriage and serves as a bridge from her last book of poetry. "Tooth for a tooth defang / Plucked feather mess" the poem begins, sounding much like lines from *Echolocation*. Soon, however, a gentler voice enters, as if watching from above:

*We the child of you and me*

*Two roots anchored each other  
Each both tree and soil*



Mani Rao

Though "Two ends of a rope knew they were one when they tried to separate", separate they do. "We took off our shoes and walked" she writes in the last stanza, a sudden prose poem, a long stretch of beach. "I watched as you waited a little longer," she says to her now-distant lover. "The high tide closed in quickly around your feet covered the bare sand and picked up the backwater."

The short poem "Address" announces the arrival of a new love, or the dream of a perfect love:

*Every evening the trees inhale birds  
Swirling back home a warm shawl  
But I still wait for my perch in your arms  
I would peg so lightly the sheets of your night flights  
We would travel in one mind your old lands my new skies  
And every morning you would breathe me fly*

But then the even shorter "Classic" tugs at this, questioning:

*If everything is impermanent why do you want it*



*Ghostmasters*  
Mani Rao  
Chameleon Press  
2010, \$14.00

*But I don't want anything for ever*

*You will disappoint everyone  
Then you will be free*

In the middle of "Duet", a line break provides suspense, and not a little anxiety:

*What if  
I don't come back  
For a lifetime  
I'll be making tea  
You'll look in from the window  
Over the porcelain bird*

And "Five-word poem" offers a meditation on the subject, or a riddle:

*Those love cannot leave alone  
Love those cannot leave alone  
Cannot love leave those alone  
Leave those cannot love alone  
Those cannot leave love alone*

*Ghostmasters* isn't all conflict and longing, though. There is a wry playfulness as Mani explores other relationships. In the charming and surprising "Which Way does the River Flow" — more a dialogue than a poem — a thirty-year-old narrator tells the story of her eighty-year-old neighbour, Hilda. After they meet, at each birthday, the narrator gets older as Hilda becomes younger. In the end:

*I was 50. She was 60.  
I gave her a bouquet of roses.  
Some days later I saw the stalks in the bin we shared.  
It crossed my mind that she had eaten the petals.*

*Hilda moved out of the building.  
I'd heard she'd left me for someone younger.*

And in "§", Mani addresses the most enduring affair a writer can have, yet even this is fraught:

*As soon as you start to read my poem I start to feel fond about you*

*Do you believe in love*

*the small l  
those little fires  
much huddling*

*two tossed aquariums in the ocean*

*Lovellies*

*Alllies*

She then returns to the love that was once so heady, so promising. This, too, has come to its conclusion. Witness the first three lines of "End of Scene":

*We don't see each other any more  
Was it art for art's sake  
or did we get some poems out of it*

Mani Rao, it seems, gets poems out of everything. She pays attention. She seizes thoughts that most of us allow to float away. She captures images and sounds then,

(continued on page 14)

# SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Judith Copithorne

**S**ubject to Change is an important book. It is made up of 17 stories, all of which are good reads and at least two of which are very important. The stories are written in the first person by a narrator who almost always appears to be Rodin. The format of the stories varies from a constant changing of direction in a humorous and complex mode to a much more serious, single minded attention to particular subjects in others. The whole book is interesting and variously contains depth, humour and complexity.

In the first story, “How I Got Married Twice” offers a light-hearted, yet complex account of two young people getting married in the sixties. Bride, groom, their friends and immediate families are drawn big in loving, but not uncritical and ironic or humorous detail. It also emphasizes the variety of ideas and questions which were whirling around in the sixties regarding the importance of getting married and of producing children.

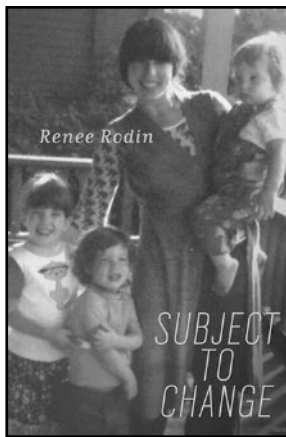
In the next story, some of the same questions again come up. We also continue to get Rodin’s reaction to the effects of the poorly managed wielding of power. This time the person who wields the power badly is the artist Judy Chicago. Rodin’s reaction is one of anger and clear disagreement which carries her through some difficult times.

In “The Real Deal”, we are shown a woman who we can easily identify as a Goddess of Understanding. This amazing woman survived the Holocaust with her love of humanity almost supernaturally intact and strong. An amazing woman, Vera turned up in Rodin’s early life, almost as if she was an ordained antidote to the anger and insanity of Rodin’s mother. A profound influence on Rodin and on Rodin’s mother, Florence, her warmth was never enough to break through the latter’s perhaps genetic predisposition to enormous anger and hostility. Florence vented these feelings on her whole family in what was often abusive behaviour, but Vera’s appearances, rare though they were, helped to mitigate the inheritance of grief that Rodin received. It is a powerful, inspiring story and Vera, who is most inspiring in it, is someone who, I think, everyone will want to know about.

What is important to remember about Rodin is that she has lived her ideas and convictions out in life. A long-time supporter of demonstrations and other work against many of the disastrous political wars and injustices of our time, she has been a long-time participant in, and coordinator and supporter of poetry, writing, magazine publishing and all the arts in Vancouver in many capacities, particularly the running of readings at the book store R2 B2 books which she owned first with her partner Billy Little and then by herself for 8 years from 1986 to 1994. She has written and published throughout this whole period, and one of the stories here relays a lot about the life of her bookstore.

“Ready for Freddy”, the story of her father’s death, is one of Rodin’s longest, strongest stories. By the time you’ve started to receive the old age pension, you’ve probably dealt with the death of at least one person close to you—in which case you’ll especially appreciate the care Rodin’s father, Abe, was given by his two daughters. This is an honest story that brings us closer in looking at what really happens in such times. The writing here is sure-footed and propelled by the emergencies of many of the situations. Rodin provides exacting details of the enormous numbers of worries, fears, issues and emotions that arise, and of the solutions that are painstakingly put into place. And then there are the solutions that sometimes, apparently just on their own, fall almost miraculously into place. These are also important to read about. Rodin’s story helps to demystify our culturally hazy understanding of death, which continues to be an impenetrable mystery; but this story helps us feel and appreciate the importance of life, and of how our lives are composed of very many little, yet immensely important things.

For me, the most powerful story in *Subject to Change* is “Googling the Bardo”. It is also the one I found most difficult to begin reading. By the end, however, I found it to be profoundly affecting. It is an important story, hopefully unfinished, of the murder of a young Thai woman named Chompoonut (Jeab) Kobram. Jeab was the fiancée of Rodin’s son, Noah, who met her while visiting Thailand. Two years later, while they were preparing to marry, Jeab was murdered.



*Subject to Change*  
Renee Rodin  
Talon Books, 2011

It appears likely that she was murdered by a man to whom she had been engaged to for a very short time several years previously. A wealthy Belgian, he broke with Jeab, then on discovering she was about to marry, demanded a reconciliation. Jeab told him this was impossible but at his insistence agreed to meet one last time. She was not seen alive again. When her body was found it could be seen that a horrific assault on her had occurred. Thai police detained the man. He managed to return to Belgium, however, and Rodin relates how she and Noah worked ceaselessly for several terrible years to bring this man to justice. Without support from the Thai, Belgian or Canadian Governments, in the end they could achieve nothing. Rodin explains all this with greatly restrained emotion, and we see the events unfolding with that speed at which catastrophes often occur. The Belgian is still at large.

As the story concludes we have a glimpse in Rodin of an affecting mental state similar perhaps to that which the ancient Greeks referred to as *catharsis*, said to occur following tragedy. Or, perhaps, it is a similar state to that found in the Tibetan Bardo after death, before a person is grabbed again by living attributes and catapulted back into a new existence.

Some writers really stand out, although each usually stands out for a different reason, or set of reasons. When one imagines how Renee Rodin produced this book in dealing with the very varied events she describes, and while continuing with her understanding and energetic support of Vancouver’s writing community, it is impossible not to be impressed by the exceptionally high quality and dedication of her latest work.

*A veteran of Canada’s poetry community since the 1960s, Judith Copithorne writes from Vancouver.*

MANI RAO (continued from page 13)

where many poets would try to cage them into a narrative, into some kind of linear “sense”, she lets them be. She hints at this process in “Sequence”:

*When a story bewilders folding unfolding like origami take a beaded chain  
place a scene on  
each bead break the chain swallow the beads  
stand still until they settle their own sequence  
collapse your intestines take a print install in an art gallery*

For more on Mani Rao, visit [www.manirao.com](http://www.manirao.com)

*JoAnn Dionne is the author of Little Emperors: A Year with the Future of China, short-listed for the George Ryga Award and a finalist for the City of Victoria Butler Book Prize. She is currently working on a book set in India, China and Tibet.*



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# REVS OF THE MORROW & VANITAS 5

## Paul Falardeau

Ed Sanders certainly has a decent reputation to look back on: present in the fabled Greenwich Village scene, he was arrested for his involvement in protests against nuclear proliferation in 1961. A year later he founded *Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts*. A graduate of NYU, he is also the founding member of the radical (even for the sixties) band, The Fugs, whose wild lyrics and relentless protest have garnered them acclaim as one of the founders of punk rock. With his new collection of poems, he now elucidate further his peace of mind, past and present.

The title alone brings many thoughts to mind. “Revs” could mean the gunning of an engine, anticipating a flashy peel-out, it could foretell revelations within the forthcoming verse, or it could mean that each of the poems dedicates itself to a reverend—a preacher—of sorts. In this, the people that populate Sanders’ work are each a sort of holy (wo) man of the future, the “morrow.” Red Groom’s comic cover perhaps relates the idea that here, within these pages, Sanders collects these figures and lets their combined story begin to take shape as a chaotic hodgepodge that defines our modern world.

The title is cleared up somewhat in the first poem where Sanders explains that the “Revs” are in fact his readers. The message is clear, the revolutionaries of the pass will falter; thus, Sanders’ work takes on new importance. Its task is to pass on the lessons of his generation for its successors. The visionaries he alludes to include environmental guru, Rachel Carson, whose *Silent Spring* heralded the unofficial start of environmentalism, or at least one of its most lasting and important reads. In the poem, “Ode to Rachel Carson,” which chronicles and even beatifies her life, Sanders says of the landmark publication “it was a moment for America.”

Other poems focus on anarchist Emma Goldman, on critiques of American leaders, and include a new translation of Sappho, including the original Greek. Still other poems laud Lawrence Ferlinghetti or reminisce about Timothy Leary. At least two poems address the life of Allen Ginsberg, and “Poseidon’s Mane” remembers poet/theorist Charles Olson. A longer piece, “Rothschild’s Fiddle” adapts a work by Anton Chekov.

Perhaps the best summation of the sentiment of Sanders book comes from one of the poems:

*The most valuable lesson from [Gary] Snyder  
I think  
is the emphasis on mindfulness*

*Know what you’re doing  
& know what Doing is doing.*

The message is clear and Ed Sanders *Revs of the Morrow* is inspiring and informative; poetic and historic; exciting and engaging.

\*\*\*

Insistence that the west coast of North America – as part of the larger Pacific Rim – is an entity that has achieved its own sense of individuality, particularly in respect to its difference from the Eastern communities of the continent, is a notion that has gained considerable credibility over the past half-century. Yet, even as we in the West forge



*Revs of the Morrow: New Poems*  
Ed Sanders  
New York: Libellum, 2008



Ed Sanders performing  
with *The Plastic People of the Universe*



*Vanitas 5*  
ed. by Vincent Katz  
Vanitas, 2010

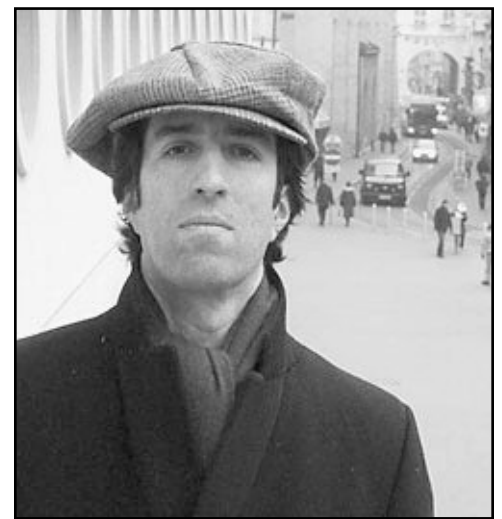
ahead in new directions from our neighbours, we still inevitably turn our heads back to the literary power centers of the East. The most prominent of these places remains New York City. It is of use to inhabitants of the Western reaches of North America to keep in touch with the goings-on of artists and writers from the New York Nexus. This is achieved in few better ways than in following publications like *Vanitas*, which chronicles contemporary work in poetry, film, visual art and critical writing.

*Vanitas 5*, takes on the subject of film and all the meanings that word might impart. Editor Vincent Katz ruminates on this in an editor’s note serendipitously placed in final pages of the edition, avoiding giving readers preconceived notions about what they are about to read and making for a useful summarising article to bind the preceding pages to their common theme.

The content is wide-ranging—inspiring photographs by Hans Schupbach, longer critical essays and features, and a wealth of poetry incorporating numerous modern styles. For instance, John Yau supplies an interesting inner-narrative prose poem, whereas Anselm Hollo’s effort is more succinct, if equally insightful:

*Rainy Night:*

*missing and losing  
more ancient than loving  
animal time  
so short  
never  
enough  
ah, let it come down*



Vincent Katz, Vienna,  
photo by Vivien Bittencourt

Still others create operetta’s (Nada Gordon) riff on Mimmo Rotella (Gerard Malanga). Elaine Uqui writes poems in response to single movie frames and Yuko Otomo digs into religion with excellent lines like “The earth circles,/Drawing a circle.// Anyone who was born on it,/Has no way but to believe/ In gravity.”

Towards the end of the publication are longer prose essays including an excellent piece by Anne Waldman titled “Infra-Consciousness: The Movies of Ed Bowes.” Of these, Jim Feast’s cognitive essay, “Iovis, America, Disobedience: The U.S. Discursive Epic,” stands out for its attention to the poetics of Eliot, Pound, Olson, Ginsberg and others as he draws parallels between contemporary writers Anne Waldman, Ed Sanders and Alice Notley.

Throughout this volume are different gems for different readers. But the real achievement of Katz and associates is the conversation that *Vanitas* promotes amongst its international community of readers, and the opportunity it gives to those willing to join in that discussion.

*Paul Falardeau writes regularly for PRRB. His essay on Robert Bringham is featured in Making Waves: Reading BC and Pacific Northwest Literature (Anvil Press).*

# RADICAL POET'S REPUBLIC: RICHARD BRAUTIGAN IN SAN FRANCISCO, 1956-1958

*Jordan Zinovich*

The man Michael McClure called “the real poet of the Diggers” moved to San Francisco in about June of 1956. At that time in his life, 21-year-old Richard Brautigan (1935–1984) was pathologically retiring, but he was also ambitious and disciplined – a slouching, owl-eyed giant whose literary voice already carried the whimsical charm for which he would become celebrated. And he was resilient, certain enough of his talent to commit himself utterly and completely to exploring it. Before reaching San Francisco he’d already embraced Emily Dickinson’s notion that poets are outsiders reporting from parallel universes and recognized the primacy of William Carlos Williams’s focus on everyday language and poetic forms that impact readers directly. When he arrived in the city he was a man on the verge, and though Beat writers like Allen Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti considered his early writing “fey,” even much of Brautigan’s juvenilia pulses with a robust and uniquely quirky humor.

In the mid ’50s most of the United States was bogged in a dullness that would have been unimaginable a decade earlier. With its World War II economic vitality fading, San Francisco was a smallish city without tall buildings, an Any Town, USA. But it was also demographically complex, including black, Hispanic, and Italian neighborhoods, and active harbor, and a large Asian population that practiced Buddhism in temples and churches.

As Brautigan first encountered it, San Francisco was on the brink of an artistic renaissance driven by the twin engines of poetry and cultural experimentation. Less than a year earlier, on 7 October 1955, the anarchist luminary Kenneth Rexroth (1934–1981) had godfathered the poetry reading that premiered *Howl* and featured work by Philip Whalen, Gary Snyder, Michael McClure, Philip Lamantia and others. It’s impossible to overstate Rexroth’s contributions to what would soon be called the San Francisco Renaissance – he was its gray eminence. The reading reconfigured American poetry, establishing the San Francisco scene as one of the most important in the nation. A mysterious new force was powering the city’s creative explosion.

Encouraged by Rexroth’s example, a new generation of poets – including Muriel Rukeyser, William Everson (Brother Antoninus), and the anarchists Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, and Thomas Parkinson – began interweaving “their imaginative life with their political consciousness.” They established a distinctively West-Coast affirmation of the poet’s role as seer, advancing a prophetic stance for poetry intended to revitalize literary and social forms. Their critical poetics took form during a series of Friday meetings that Rexroth organized at his home on Potrero Hill, for which he developed a radical reading list that was widely shared. (Robert Duncan later claimed, “We were all brought up on Daddy Rexroth’s reading list.”) Their political practice aligned itself with principles expounded by the Libertarian Circle.

The ultimate influence of the Libertarian Circle was as much cultural as it was political. In time the Circle’s meetings grew so popular that they sometimes took place at Fugazi Hall, near Washington Square in San Francisco’s North Beach neighborhood, where an audience of two hundred or more would gather – writers, painters, theater people, physicians, academics, engineers, psychiatrists, blue collar syndicalists, longshoremen, sailors, carpenters, printers, and many others. San Francisco’s creative community soon adopted anarchism and pacifism as general political programs, and relaxed bohemianism became the favored lifestyle. Word spread widely that a new kind of anarchist community was forming, and when the renowned Conscientious Objector Lewis Hill arrived from the east coast to launch the first listener-sponsored radio station in the United States, KPFA/FM “Pacifica Radio,” an even larger local audience grew interested. (Within a few years Pacifica Radio would host a weekly Rexroth book review program, Alan Watts’ wide-ranging explorations of philosophy, film reviews by Pauline Kael, and Ralph Gleason’s astute analysis of jazz and other musical styles.) With access to emerging little magazines, the Pacifica Radio audience, and other viable non-academic outlets for a personalized aesthetic linked to a pacifist-anarchist consciousness, the cultural transformation known as the San Francisco

Renaissance was born.

Richard Brautigan’s early life had been mired in poverty, neglect, and abuse. His biological father and mother separated before he was born, and in the years that followed his mother abandoned-then-returned-to him and his younger sister on several occasions. While his family gypsied around the Pacific Northwest during his early childhood he developed a passionate attachment to the out-of-doors, where he could be safe and explore his own thoughts. In about 1943, his mother finally settled in Eugene, Oregon, providing him with a stable period of relative normalcy during which he began to write seriously and to dream of a literary career. However, he didn’t know that his surname was Brautigan until his high-school graduation – until then believing it to be Porterfield, the name of the one of his mother’s several husbands. For some unfathomable reason, his mother chose the moment of his graduation to inform him, destabilizing his world yet again. At the time of his flight to San Francisco, Richard

Brautigan took with him only his newly discovered name, an affinity for the natural world, and a conception of writing as a vocation.

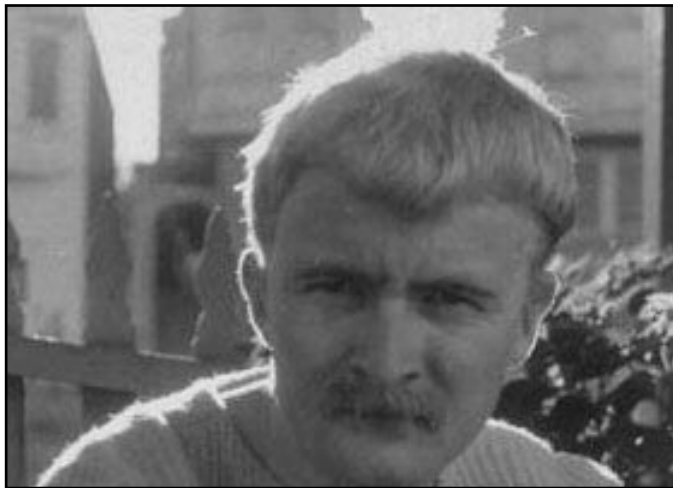
During his early time in San Francisco, Brautigan remained desperately poor. Yet North Beach was the center for the city’s thriving writing community and he clung to the neighborhood. He supported himself by delivering telegrams for Western-Union and doing other odd jobs, and slept in parked cars and cheap hotels. Eighteen-year-old poet Ron Loewinsohn was one of his first close friends. Since Loewinsohn was underage they couldn’t participate together in the literary bar scene. On cold days they met in a laundromat or at the Co-Existence Bagel Shop, which was a social center for North Beach writers until it closed in 1960. Warm days they spent in Washington Square Park. At the time, Brautigan’s hair was short and he wore Buddy Holly glasses. A hipster girl named Ginny Alder grew intrigued

with him and began greeting him on the street as he wheeled past on his Western Union bicycle. He never responded. Loewinsohn later commented, “[He] almost never spoke, and walked around with his hands in his pockets, like he was hiding from everybody.” Because he was so intensely blond, Ginny Alder decided that he must be Austrian and couldn’t speak English.

Brautigan was one of the generation that Rexroth had identified as being in a state of absolute revolt. His early attempts to establish himself as a writer were projected onto Rexroth’s anarchist ideological green screen, though his understanding of it was complicated by the growing conflict between the rising influence of the invading eastern Beats and a pushback response from a locally-focused, magic-based poesy championed by poets like Helen Adam, Robert Duncan, and Jack Spicer. Despite his shyness, Brautigan approached the writers generous enough to notice him, lurking in the background of their world, too star struck and uncertain of himself to dare reading his own poetry. To his unruly Beat elders he was a gentle alien. Some, like Lawrence Ferlinghetti, acted kindly towards him, but few of the Beats viewed his work favorably. His odd sense of humor and benign humanitarianism were contrary to their cynical stridencies. Allen Ginsberg took to calling him Bunthorne, after the winsome poet of Gilbert and Sullivan’s operetta *Patience* who maintained:

*You must lie upon the daisies and  
discourse in novel phrases of your  
complicated state of mind, . . .*

Ginsberg’s glib approbation was generally echoed by the other Beats, who were busy asserting their own brands of solipsistic individuality. Ferlinghetti, whose City Lights bookstore was emerging as a cultural landmark and who eventually published some of Brautigan’s poetry and chapters from his poetic novel, explained his own stance: “As an editor I was always waiting for Richard to grow up as a writer. It seems to me he was essentially a naïf; and I don’t think he cultivated that childishness, I



*Brautigan in San Francisco, 1959*

*Photograph by Virginia Dionne Alder, Brautigan's first wife.*



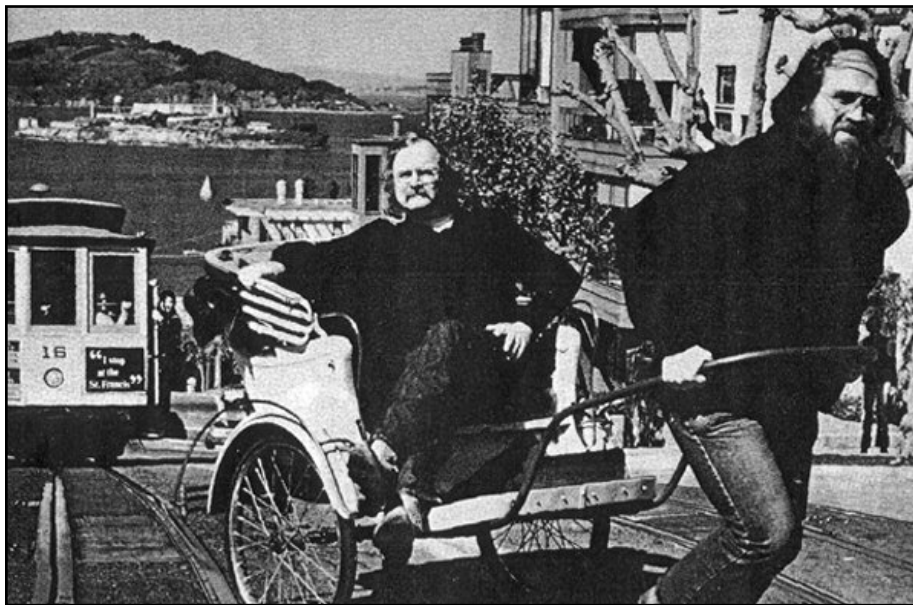
think it came naturally.”

Brautigan was undeterred by his lowly reputation. He wrote in one of his poems of the time that he was “an unknown poet” – which didn’t mean that he didn’t have friends, but that his friends knew he was a poet only “because I have told them so.” The poem ends with what can be described as a characteristically Brautiganian twist, a uniquely arresting manner of engaging his readers that few of his contemporaries ever managed to even approximate:

*Let us pretend that my mind is a taxi  
and suddenly (“What the hell’s coming off?”)  
you are riding in it. (1)*

Few of the people Brautigan was meeting had suffered in early life as he had, so they were unprepared to appreciate how tough and talented he really was. Rexroth’s “natural = anarchist” principle fit well to his sensibilities. As his friend Michael McClure wrote later, “San Francisco was a rich network of streams to ‘trout about’ in. . . . Vibrancy of thought was in the air. Consciousness of California landscape and Oriental thought were in the air we breathed, and it was made dark and moist by the Pacific beating on the coast of Monterey.” Though the eminent Rexroth, thirty years older than Brautigan, was far too elevated a personage to approach for advice, young Richard practiced an intuitive bohemianism and began charting an idiosyncratically anarchic map of time and space for imaginative literature and performance.

As his self confidence grew, he started frequenting a counter-cultural bar named The Place. The Place had first opened in 1953 on Grant Avenue between Filbert and Union streets. The joint-owners, Knute Styles and Leo Krikorian (who was also part owner of the Co-Existence Bagel Shop), had studied at the anarchist-influenced Black Mountain College. They used the intimate intensity of their small storefront bar to advance the ideological notions that “Revolution Is Personal,” and that “Social Ripples Can Generate Cultural Waves.”



*Roger Ressmeyer photograph of Richard Brautigan Brautigan seated in rickshaw pulled by friend Dwain Richard Cox in 1981.*

The Place had ambience. Its enormous, intricately-carved antique bar, with fluted glass lamps and tarnished silvered mirrors set between ornate columns, had been constructed in New York City and came to San Francisco by ship through Straights of Magellan in the early 19th century. At the rear of the barroom was a balcony to which Styles and Krikorian fixed a painted yellow soapbox as a kind of lectern – flights of stairs on either side of the balcony linked it to the main floor. The Place was a hard-drinkers’ bar that mingled members of the working class and the demimonde with active and aspiring culture-workers. Sexuality of all persuasions was welcomed. Painters and poets of all descriptions were encouraged to “come out” as artists. Local painters Jay DeFeo and Wally Hedrick hung their work on the walls, and Robert LaVigne’s flower paintings illustrated a display of Allen Ginsberg’s poems.

Among the bar’s most prominent patrons were the openly gay poets Robert Duncan (1919–1988) and Jack Spicer (1925–1965). Duncan and Spicer were Berkeley trained, shared Rexroth’s anarchist focus, and had helped found The Libertarian Circle before splitting off to pursue their individual trajectories. The foppish Duncan had taught at Black Mountain College, and while there had disseminated his opinion that Jack Spicer was a major American poet. The more retiring Spicer – whose favored costume integrated work jeans with faded work shirts, a black turtleneck sweater, a longshoreman’s sock cap, lace-up boots, and a leather jacket – had recently returned

from sojourns in Minnesota, New York, and Boston. Though one of the founders of the “6” Gallery, which had sponsored the *Howl* reading in 1955, by 1956 Spicer considered most Beat work facile, apolitical, and technically inept. He was leading a charge against the exploding popularity of the Beats’ raggedy intuitivism, reasserting the language-focused poetics spawned during the time of the Libertarian Circle, basing his imaginative positioning on the classical traditions of Western mythology and poetry rather than on spontaneity and ersatz Eastern philosophies.

When Black Mountain College closed in the summer of 1956, many former students trekked west to join Duncan and Spicer in the Bay Area. Since The Place was “Spicer’s bar,” that was where they congregated. But The Place was also favored by the Beats, and public debates on the merits of the differing poetic strategies often grew heated. Brautigan was too intellectually inexperienced and personally diffident to insert himself into the debates.

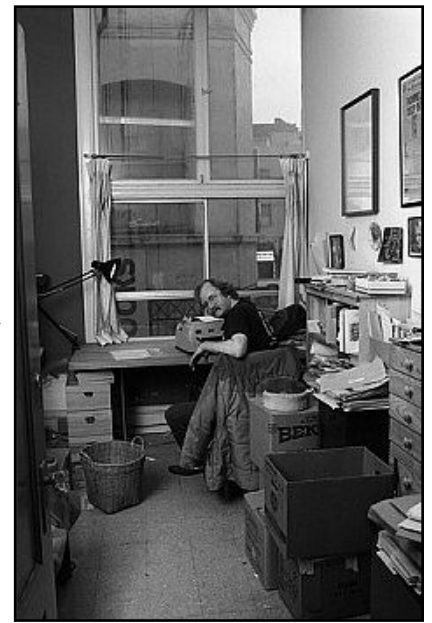
But he listened avidly as the various poets read their newest material, and in conversation with his friends he weighed the merits of the differing positions. And because Duncan and Spicer were available and open, he sought their advice about his own poetry, even going so far as to give them copies of some of his work.

On December 6, 1956, Robert Duncan wrote a letter urging Brautigan to attend the Poetry as Magic Workshop that planned to initiate in 1957: “I suggest that before you think of reading [publicly] you go into the open Forum of your contemporaries.” (2) Now Duncan had raised money to fund the workshop, and had persuaded the San Francisco Library to provide Spicer with a room every Tuesday evening from mid-February until the end of May. The prospectus Spicer circulated to announce the Poetry as Magic Workshop asserted that it would not be a course in technique or “how to write.” Instead it would be “a group exploration of the practices of the new magical school of poetry which is best represented in the work of [Federico Garcia] Lorca, [Antonin] Artaud, Charles Olson and Robert Duncan.” Spicer viewed Lorca as the ideal anti-Fascist homosexual martyr; Artaud as an archetypal lunatic actor/dramaturge; and Duncan as a true mage. Olson’s name appeared as an ironic reference to his essay “Against Wisdom as Such,” in which he had designated California’s poets a “school of ominous sorcerers.”

Though Spicer had considerable knowledge of Renaissance sources and grimoires, he had declared to Robin Blaser that “there was no good source from which to learn magic.” Instead, he intended to subject the workshop participants to a kind of Whorf-Sapierian exercise in linguistic and cultural disruption. Attendance would be limited to fifteen, and the fifty aspirants who applied faced an extraordinary “questionnaire” designed to prepare them for a deep entanglement with instability. Among the questions asked were: “If you had a chance to eliminate three political figures from the world, which would you choose?” What political group, slogan, or idea in the world today has the most to do with Magic?” “With Poetry?” “What animal; insect; and star do you most resemble?” Spicer interrogated his would-be students’ religious and philosophical views and explored their knowledge of history. They were asked to record the funniest joke they knew, to choose cards (playing or Tarot) to express their absolute desires and fears, and to invent a dream in which they appeared as a poet. (The workshop experience would attempt to realize each of those dreams.) To stimulate the kind of poetic output he wanted, Spicer composed three short original poetic frames with blanks keyed to generate inspiration.

From the fifty applicants, only nine were deemed suitable. Spicer has been described as carrying his head “in a flat, scrunched way, like he was expecting a sudden blow from behind. . . . always crusty and short.” If he saw pretension he could be cynical and cutting, but to those he liked and respected he was warmly supportive. As an intensely repressed Gay man he was someone who comprehended life’s treacheries, how easily it could batter and break the vulnerable. And he developed a genuine fondness for Richard Brautigan. Though Brautigan was not among the chosen, Spicer invited him to attend The Magic Workshop as a spectator.

So began one of the defining periods of Brautigan’s young life. He was not the only regular spectator attending, and was not made to feel like an alien fly on the wall. Initially, the workshop group met on the third floor of the Library, later moving to the San Francisco State University Poetry Center. Its magical focus centered on aesthetic disruption and “passion, rather than abracadabra.” To Spicer, transgression and blas-



*Roger Ressmeyer photograph of Richard Brautigan in his North Beach office, located next door to City Lights Books, in 1981.*

phemy were formal practices that could dismantle and recompose received cultural views. According to George Stanley, one of the chosen nine, the assignments progressed approximately as follows: 1) Write a blasphemy; 2) Create a Universe; 3) Become a flesh-eating beast. The shared assignments helped advance a group dynamic that included power and sexual games.

Suddenly, Brautigan had the supportive literary community he'd been longing for. Never before had he experienced such focused creative intensity, and the workshop assignments stoked his imaginative fire: Write your own personal creation myth; Create a sacrificial ritual; Evoke magic spirits; ; Depict the horrors of home life; How would you cook a baby? Each week generated an enormous amount of new work that the group needed to share with a wider audience. And the sense of unity that the workshop participants were developing spread throughout the bars of North Beach, with Spicer encouraging it by promoting outside readings and discussions. Bars like The Tin Angel, The Black Cat, The Green Lantern, Vesuvio, Tosca, The Silver Dollar, The Oak Room, The Fallen Angel, and The Place all became hotbeds of exploration, with patrons conspiring to engage as directly as possible in this new practice of magical poetics.

Accompanying Brautigan's involvement in this poetic community came a blossoming of his personal life. He and Ron Loewinsohn had continued their regular laundromat conferences, and were conversing intently one day when Ginny Alder joined them. After months of pondering, she had decided. That night she took Richard home and initiated him in an earthier sorcery than what the Magic Workshop had to offer. Shortly after that he moved into her apartment at 557A Greenwich Street, and on June 8, 1957, almost exactly a year after he had first arrived in San Francisco, he and Ginny married in Reno, Nevada.

Neither had been married previously. Both were twenty-two years of age. Both gave San Francisco as their place of residence, and when they returned to the city, they moved to Filbert Street. Their new apartment was an antique railroad flat, its walls layered with different colored coats of chipped paint. There were no buildings on either side, so stepping into it off the side of the hill was like walking into the sky. Each room had windows that overlooked San Francisco Bay. There was a row of glass jars on narrow open shelves in the kitchen, each one filled with exotic items and strange herbs from Chinatown. When the Brautigans moved in they shared their new place with a friend of Ginny's, but the friend soon moved to Los Angeles. Regarding Brautigan at this time, Caroling (Lind) Geary has written:

*I can't remember him sitting down. I think he liked the empty Fillbert Street apartment for the windows. He did look out a lot. Could "lanking" be a verb, that is, participle? I would then say Richard Brautigan was lanking around. As in, he was being lanky. If I had been there for Halloween, Ginger would have come as a pumpkin, a lantern smiling light. Richard would have come as the farmer/scarecrow/ghost, a hover person that is always a couple of inches up from earth. Gliding. The Grateful Dead Song plays in my head, "In the Attic of my mind, where all of my dreams are stored." That would be my song for Brautigan. (3)*

Ginny was the stable one, supporting them both by working at secretarial jobs while Brautigan wrote and picked up odd jobs. Evenings they frequented the popular gathering spots for poets and artists. When The Place established a "Blabbermouth Night," Brautigan sometimes performed at the weekly Blabbermouth events. Blabbermouth Night provided performers the opportunity to make a public spectacle of themselves in hopes of winning a magnum of champagne, with the cleverness and complexity of their rant determining the length of their performance. The audience was raucous and irreverent, much like the audiences at early poetry slams of the 1980s and '90s, so it was an excellent venue for inexperienced performers to toughen themselves. Other places the young couple haunted included Vesuvio, where Brautigan often just sat and wrote; Mr. Otis's; Gino and Carlo's, on Green Street; and the Co-Existence Bagel Shop.

On June, 9, 1957, following a reading of material produced during the , Jack Spicer had suggested that Joe Dunn start a press to publish the writing of workshop members. Dunn was one of the original chosen ones, and at Spicer's urging he attended a four-week course on operating an AM Multilith press and took a job in the Print Department of the Greyhound Bus Company. Soon afterwards, came into being. Richard Brautigan's long poem would be the eighth of the ten chapbooks White

Rabbit turned out between November 1957 and September 1958. The other poets included in that first run of publications were Steve Jonas, , Denise Levertov, Ebbe Borregaard, George Stanley, Robert Duncan, Harold Dull, Helen Adam, and Charles Olsen – pretty heady company for a young writer to join. Fortunately for Brautigan, *The Galilee Hitch-Hiker* saw print before Dunn's increasingly debilitating methamphetamine habit finally overcame him.

Unlike the expansive career-oriented ethos of the outward-looking Beats, the community surrounding The Magic Workshop grew ever more locally focused. Its insularity was partly a result of Spicer's personal proclivities and partly a consequence of the participants taking the magical aspect of their mandate seriously. Though coexistence was possible between the Beat and the Workshop aesthetics, it was necessarily an uneasy one. Excerpts from Helen Adam's short play "Initiation to the Magic Workshop" capture the Workshop participants' commitment to transgression and their antipathy towards the Beat aesthetic as practiced by Ginsberg.

SPICER: *Can you call up a spirit, and kill a child,  
Create a universe tame or wild,  
Blaspheme, and flourish through a ritual feast,  
Or change your shape to a flesh eating beast?*  
INITIATE: *Let me come in. Let me come in.  
There's somebody coming who wears no skin.  
The velvet ones are close at my back.  
And a wolf just crawled through the keyhole crack.  
...  
INITIATE: Please let me in, it's cold out here  
Away up high on the dark third floor  
With the ghost of Ginsberg howling low at the door. . . .(4)*

As anti-Christian anarchists deconstructing mainstream values they rejected conventional mores. And the stronger they did that, the greater grew their conspiratorial sense of camaraderie. The North Beach neighborhood absorbed and amplified their efforts, providing them with a territorial base. Their deep identification with place (North Beach/San Francisco) and group was a precursor to the emergence a few years later of the psychotropically charged, magic-driven Haight-Ashbury community.

When The Magic Workshop came to an end, the participants and their affiliates continued an informal Sunday afternoon meeting at various sites, finally settling regularly in the apartment of Joe and Carolyn Dunn. The quick, weird trek from North Beach through the Broadway Tunnel to Polk Gulch, where the apartment was located, was one attraction of the setting. Another was the enthusiastic and expanding membership of the Sunday Meetings. Though the hierophants remained Spicer and Duncan, an attuned and radiant order of younger psychonauts and visionaries now surrounded them, including crossovers from the Beat community like Joanne Kyger, Gary Snyder, David Meltzer, and Michael McClure, as well as Brautigan, Ron Loewinsohn, Jerome Mallman, Nemi Frost, and Tom Field. But the group's energizing charge emanated from Dunn's devotion to White Rabbit Press. His collaborative attitude towards publication encouraged group input. David Meltzer has remarked: "Joe . . . worked for Greyhound Bus Line and on the weekends we'd 'liberate' their mimeograph machines to run off booklets by Jack Spicer, Robert Duncan, Denise Levertov, and others under his imprint."

The poets attending the Sunday Meeting tended to be a more disciplined and lyrically-focused group than those who gathered around the big-name, publicity-seeking Beats; which is not to say that they were any less hedonistic! They drank, did drugs and partied, had sex with one another and played together. In a very real sense they viewed themselves as Spicer's acolytes. They were too young to have done much actual adventuring in their lives, so they focused themselves passionately and without reservation on living a life in art. Michael McClure describes it nicely: "Our biggest adventure in the fifties (and it was huge and without proportion, on the scale of our nervous systems and the Universe) was literature, and trips of the mind through literature, and the literary wars for dominance in North Beach and elsewhere in San Francisco. Our study of poetry and each other's poetry was marvelously, miraculously intense."<sup>(5)</sup> There was a mysterious, intuitive awareness, a magical cult-like synchronicity that they shared. They were intent on changing their awareness of reality, developing a new consciousness, a kind of "roup mind."



Roger Ressmeyer photograph of Richard Brautigan in his North Beach office, located next door to City Lights Books, in 1981.

Despite their informality and hedonism, Jack Spicer made certain that the Sunday Meetings remained deadly serious when it came to poetry. Participants shared their work, criticizing one another as incisively as they possibly could. In Spicer's view, poetry was an instrument that transcended space and time, and he and Duncan took every opportunity to demonstrate that fact. Spicer often started the sessions with a heuristic exercise, on one occasion turning to bibliomancy: consulting a French-English dictionary to determine the focus. The dictionary opened spontaneously to the word *metallurgy*. Then Duncan read the poem ("The Question") he'd brought to share:

*Does the old alchemist  
speak in metaphor  
of a spiritual splendor?  
Or does he remember  
how that metal is malleable?(6)*

The synchronicity of focus and response captivated everyone at the event.

With passion and abracadabra invading his life, Brautigan opened to the world around him. It was a new day. His hair grew longer, a moustache started to sprout, and, most remarkably, in September of 1957 he was confident enough of himself as both a person and a poet to participate in the 11th Annual Arts Festival in North Beach, which was held that year in Fugazi Hall. Accompanying Ron Loewinsohn and Ebbe Borregaard, he participated in the Saturday marathon of daytime readings by young poets.

Though he'd published a few pieces during the preceding years, 1957 saw ten of Brautigan's poems appear in print.<sup>(7)</sup> Some of them show the influence of the Magic Workshop and hint at Spicer Circle anecdotes. "15 Stories in One Poem," for instance, mentions the extraordinary death of a baby. "The World Will Never End," describes a flophouse man who pees in the sink, as Spicer is said to have done, and may be the poem that a friend remembers Brautigan saying he read at The Place. References to the devil, a debt-driven undertaker wishing more people would die, and the rape of a seven-year-old girl by twelve Roman soldiers all advance undeniably transgressive themes. One of the most complicated of the poems, is an early exercise in the reality-based prose poetry that Brautigan would later develop as a novelistic technique. Michael McClure calls what he was doing at the time "Soul making – carefully, cautiously, tersely, but still with some sweetness and even courtly." Brautigan was emerging as the poet he had aspired to become.

With growing appreciation for his protégé's craftsmanship (within a few years he would help Brautigan shape and craft the "novel" *Trout Fishing in America*), Jack Spicer composed an encomium that began:

*Innocence is a drug to be protected against strangers  
Not to be sold to police agents or rather  
Not to be sold.  
When you protect it a sudden chill  
Comes in the window  
When you proclaim it it becomes a wet marijuana cigarette  
Which cannot be lit by matches. (8)*

Unlike the Beats, Spicer admired the pure delight in words and word play that Brautigan was mastering: his darkly sophisticated naiveté; his pumpkin worldliness. And he valued Brautigan's company, welcoming and mentoring him – provided, of course, that he remained a regular devotee of the bar and Sunday Meeting scenes.

For Brautigan, 1958 was an exhilarating time. As a follow-up to The Magic Workshop, in September of '58 Robert Duncan offered his Workshop in Basic Techniques, a more formal seminar that became a kind of master class for the Spicer-Circle poets. As Duncan imposed increasing linguistic discipline on the group's work, Joanne Kyger – a sparkling sylph and a talented social organizer – impishly tweaked the nose social strictures that Spicer kept trying to impose on his disciples. Spicer disliked the Beats. Kyger grew increasingly attracted to Gary Snyder. He despised the Beat focus on eastern religion and woolly-headed "first-thought-best-thought" intuitivism.

She embraced aspects of Beat spontaneity and grew interested in Buddhism. Spicer insisted that they gather nightly at his bar to drink, outrage the tourists, and discuss topics of his choosing: "Failure to attend the nightly bar scene was not far from treason and might result in ostracism," claimed one regular. Kyger enjoyed drinking, but also embraced pills, marijuana, and the Beat favorite "valo," which was the speed-impregnated cotton filler sold in over-the-counter nose inhalers. At about the time that Jack Kerouac published *The Dharma Bums*, Kyger and George Stanley established a loose, deeply affectionate conspiracy they called The Dharma Committee.

Regarding the birth of The Dharma Committee, Kyger alleges: "Spicer [had] this Dada surrealist sense, you know, having encounters in bars, totally non-academic environments. He loved to set us up. The Dharma Committee was kind of a joke, like ... 'So you're interested in Snyder are you — Well, ... start a Dharma Committee....' I didn't even know what dharma meant ..."<sup>(9)</sup> Although he was not one of the founding members, Brautigan was a welcome playfellow. Many of Kyger's whimsical rules appealed to him, like "All members must be depraved once a week." He enjoyed the gatherings at the Bread and Wine Mission, on the corner of Grant Avenue and Greenwich Street in North Beach, which centered on free spaghetti dinners and regular poetry readings, at one of which he was actually paid. The Committee enjoyed twisting noses, like the time they so enraged poet Kirby Doyle that he ranted down the streets of the Fillmore District calling down imprecations on them and all their descendants. And their parties were unlike anything Brautigan had attended before. Dora Geissler/Dull, "wife" of Harold Dull, one of the original nine chosen for the Magic Workshop, has described the elation they shared:

*The whole was so much greater than the parts, so that when we left the group we felt so diminished that we couldn't bear to separate from each other. That's when we'd get into these long all-nighters, where we'd wind up back at somebody's house, to eat and drink some more, and then we'd all fall down. Joanne called it "heaping" – we'd put on extra clothes, and sleep like little logs, end to end. Then we would wind up in the bar the next day. We just couldn't bear not to be with each other. (10)*

Though the drugs that Kyger and others in the group favored brought him fits of paranoia, Brautigan couldn't get enough of the social scene. He had never had friends like these. Shared ideas, mentorship, personal warmth – he was welcomed unconditionally, and his writing was admired. He loved the bar conversations and began drinking increasingly heavily.

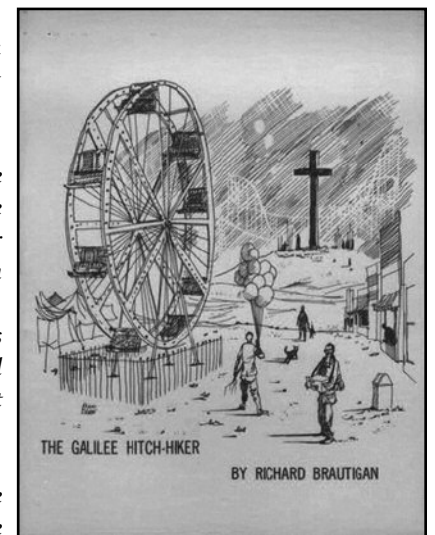
Before the end of 1959, Joanne Kyger would leave San Francisco to join Gary Snyder in Japan and the Dharma Committee would dissolve, but while the Committee and the Sunday Meetings continued Brautigan wanted to be part of them. Unfortunately, in the typically solipsistic fashion of inexperienced young men, he neglected to consider the impact his activities were having on his wife. The demands of his extremely active social life placed increasing strains on Ginny, who didn't relish her evolving role as wage-slave poetry widow.

#### Notes

- (1) From *The Edna Webster Collection of Undiscovered Writings*, frontispiece.
- (2) See John F. Barber, "Brautigan Bibliography and Archive: A bio-bibliographical archive for Richard Brautigan, his life, and writings"; <http://www.brautigan.net/chronology1950.html>.
- (3) Ibid.
- (4) From Helen Adam's play "Initiation to the Magic Workshop," 121.
- (5) See Michael McClure, "Ninety-One Things about Richard Brautigan," 176.
- (6) See Lewis Ellingham and Kevin Killian, *POET Be Like God: Jack Spicer and the San Francisco Renaissance*, 108–9.
- (7) "A Young Poet," appeared in *Epos* 8(4) Summer 1957; "The Final Ride," in *Mainstream* "San Francisco Issue" 2(2) Summer-Autumn 1957; "The Daring Little Guy on the Burma Shave Sign" and "The World Will Never End" in *Existaria, a Journal of Existant Hysteria* (7) September–October 1957; "They Keep Coming Down the Dark Streets" and "15 Stories in One Poem" in *Danse Macabre* 1(1); and "The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth's Beer Bottles," "The Mortuary Bush," "Twelve Roman Soldiers and an Oatmeal Cookie," and "Gifts" were featured in Leslie Woolf Hedley's anthology *Four New Poets* (San Francisco: Inferno Press).
- (8) "For Dick," from *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer*, 59.



*Four New Poets, Brautigan's first book appearance, published in 1957 by Inferno Press. Signed in 1971.*



*The Galilee Hitch-Hiker, Richard Brautigan's first proper book (the single-poem broadside The Return of the River had been published in same month). White Rabbit Press, May 1958*



"Which Poet?" a painting of Brautigan and other poets at The Place in San Francisco by Caroling Lind Geary.

- (9) See Joanne Kyger, "Joanne Kyger: A Bloomsday Interview in NYC," 4.  
 (10) See Ellingham and Killian, 146.

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Jordan Zinovich is a senior editor at *Autonomedia* and a member of the *Amsterdam Balloon Company*.

SORESTAD (continued from page 10)

*a dense living presence that left  
with you and held like new skin.*

Each poem is skin, torn from a wound that is healed by words and the memory of healing. Every moment is an ending from which there is no return, as in leaving a house where a family was raised, but it is also a beginning.

*We pulled the door shut and heard the lock  
fall into place one last time. Silence  
in our triple decade wake,  
the unrecoverable and unseen.*

Even though this book has an elegiac tone, there is hope in the locus of a circle that joins husband and wife, parent and child, animal and human.

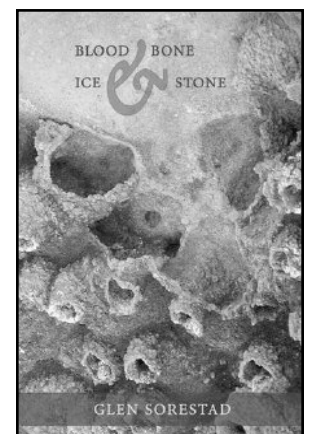
*In his dreams a towering  
bear glistens, a green giant  
beneath a brilliant moon,  
head tilted at the stars  
as it moves, first on one foot,  
then the other, its huge  
body a marvel of dancing lines.*

This is the joy of being, plainsong that transcends the present climate of poetry with its discussions of form and content, with its emphasis on winning. It is what it is, the voice of a rational man whose quiet and passionate voice rings with truth.

Victoria Poet Laureate Linda Rogers' most recent book is *Muscle Memory from Ekstasis Editions*



Leaving Hold Me Here



Blood & Bone, Ice & Stone

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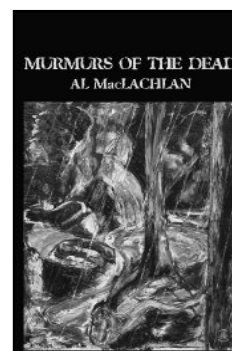
"This is a very good first novel, with plenty of promise. MacLachlan can set action in a place... we have a writer to watch."

Margaret Cannon  
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*After the Funeral* (fiction)  
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ISBN 978-1-89743-65-1  
*Murmurs of the Dead* (fiction)  
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Set in coastal British Columbia, *Murmurs of the Dead* explores a way of life that is slowly disappearing. Central to the story are the unsolved murders of drug dealers, and when the young journalists discover the cover-up it increasingly appears to be the work of vigilantes. But how many townspeople were involved, and how were the murders kept secret so long?

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# DOUGLAS COUNTY JAIL BLUES

James D. Sullivan

Every Thursday afternoon at the Douglas County Correctional Center in Lawrence, Kansas, Brian Daldorph leads a two-hour poetry class. The inmates in the class are convicted of felonies and waiting transfer to state prison, or they are serving out short-term misdemeanor sentences. Others, the fabrics of their lives all torn and unraveled, await trial, can't make bail, or have no one left on the outside who can or will post it for them—or else the legal system already knows them too well to allow them out on bail. The poetry class—according to Mike Carron, Program Director at the jail and writer of the introduction to this collection—is the jail's most popular program.

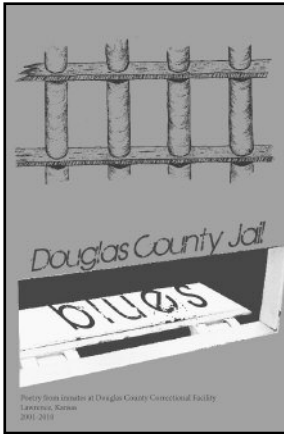
Daldorph teaches poetry at University of Kansas, edits a literary magazine, and writes his own poetry (I'd especially recommend his 2008 collection of sonnet-size dramatic monologues *From the Inside Out*), but this volunteer work at the county jail has become his central literary commitment. The prisoners free-write, respond to a writing prompt, catch the mood of some music Daldorph plays for them. He writes along with them (some of those poems are collected in his other 2008 book *Jail Time*—busy year), and then they all share their work aloud. According to the introduction, the poetry students always laugh in recognition of their own lives in one another's words, and sometimes candor releases tears, dangerous signs of weakness in a jail but a comfort that these men, hitting bottom, crave.

Daldorph has edited this collection, *Douglas County Jail Blues*, of poems written in that jail class since he took it over in 2001. This is no literary landmark, no breakthrough of national significance—there have been plenty of other collections of prison poems—but rather a locally focused record of a particular moment in a few dozen lives. Twenty-six individual poets—using first names, nicknames, aliases, and monikers, some of them even using their full legal names—as well as the unnamed contributors to several group-written poems, offer one another and, incidentally, us outside readers a view of their disordered lives.

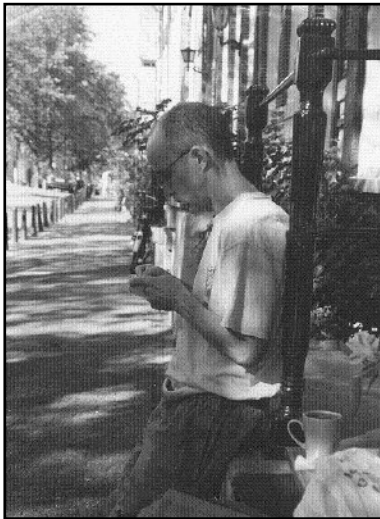
Carron's introduction warns against romanticizing the jail poetry class, looking for that spark of self-expression that leads to a whole new life of upright respectability. Sure, self-expression can lead to honest reflection and to a self-awareness, steps on a path to a more deliberate and organized life. And for those whose lives have been ruled by impulse and the need to immediately gratify an addiction—for them, working all week on a poem they hope their Thursday classmates will admire can be a rare experience of delayed gratification, a little practice in control. There's a pleasure in getting a bit of one's life down on paper, in speaking to others who understand one's troubles because, despite some differences in detail, their troubles are the same. They write poetry to get out what otherwise they cannot say. Here's an anonymous line in one group poem: "I write because the stories in my head are on fire and I have to put them out before they burn me."

Many of them write about the addictions that got them in trouble and landed them in that jail. An inmate called Chopper declares his foremost concern: "The matter at hand is the state of my mind with no meth in my blood." Donndilla da Great finds himself torn between willing spirit and weak flesh:

*I told the parole board that I would  
be a better man  
And I told my cell mate I was  
afraid of the crackhead that lies within*



*Douglas County Jail  
Blues*  
Brian Daldorph, ed.  
Coal City Review, 2010.  
\$10 US. 80 pp



Brian Daldorph

Headly describes his withdrawal, forced upon him by his jail stay, from his alcohol addiction, his prayer that he might keep his food down.

*I don't know why I do this  
but when I get well again  
I know there is one thing for sure  
my vodka will not be far away  
He can't see an end to the pain.*

Some do find a measure of peace. Danegrus Dane finds it in his cell. Though he's allowed eight hours a day out of it, he isolates himself there, leaving only for meal time and meds call. He thus keeps himself away from the "grief, anguish, disbelief & anger" of the rest of the jail. In contrast, the solitude of even jail cell bleakness is serene. D. Douglas remembers a much better time in "The Jacket":

*I had a \$1000 suit  
I wore to Jardine's.  
Three pieces  
and a pretty girl I no longer know.  
A jazz band played  
till it sounded like Motown.  
we danced together  
till the Motown sounded like swing . . .*

*we got drunk  
in the snow outside  
after they closed  
and that pretty girl I no longer know  
still has my jacket.*

Better, in jail, to live in the glow of that memory, that crisp little anecdote, than amid the "grief, anguish, disbelief & anger." Bobby Hickman says that he relies on "small dreams," including "Popcorn at the movies,/funnel cakes at the fair, bacon & eggs in the/morning." The imagery is banal and ordinary, yes, but in the context of profound loss, unspeakably poignant.

And speaking of jailhouse context, Tyrone Edwards writes a verse letter that could have come from any homesick young man gone away for college, work, or military service—gone far from the one he loves. Having nothing to communicate other than his aching desire for contact, he describes his moment of melancholy peace just looking out the window. That moment of peace and that reach toward human contact are what matter most for him. And that's one of the things Daldorph's poetry class provides, if only for a couple hours a week. Edwards ends his poem, otherwise a love poem to someone on the outside, with an acknowledgement of what the class provides him:

*I realize I'm crying for more  
reasons than I can put into words, and that this  
letter has become a scrapbook entry. Not that  
you don't deserve to read these pages. It's  
just that I don't have any new material  
and writing class is on Thursday.*

Imagine the nods and smiles around the room when he read that one aloud. Or the laughter that must have boomed out when Jae Wae read his very short "A Good Excuse":

*I only come back  
to see if I  
can get in  
writing class.*

(continued on page 22)

# ARCHEOLOGY OF VIOLENCE

Alan Graubard

I came across Pierre Clastres quite by chance several years ago at a large bookstore affiliated with an uptown university in New York. The title drew my interest and when I saw that the novelist Paul Auster provided the translation, I grew more intrigued. *Chronicle of the Guayaki Indians* was a revelation of sorts that Clastres' previous book in English, *Society Against the State*, framed. Here was an anthropologist whose research had convinced him that much of his predecessors' works on primitive societies had missed the point, some by a large degree, some by a small degree. Simply, despite the ethnographic evidence, anthropology was not immune from the ideological distortions that Western culture commonly made when considering primitive societies. Knowing how they lived did not ensure that we understood why they lived as they did. And at the heart of that distortion was the power of the state; a monumental presence that we, if only for the sake of clarity, struggle to engage and disengage.

*Archeology of Violence*, now in a new edition, carries a similar potency if in more discrete, self-contained chapters; twelve, in fact, that focus on seminal issues dealing with the state and alterity, which Europe met in Native America.

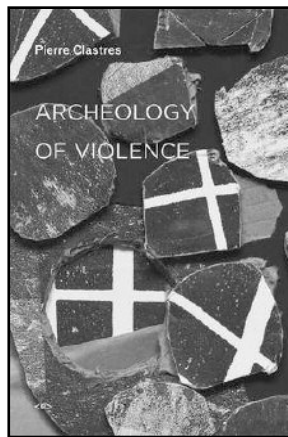
By his insights, Clastres revives what alterity is and what it implies. His vigor in questioning given paradigms has also served to instill a political context within anthropology precise to the culture and what we bring to it. From his docu-satire on tourism to his discussions of ethnocide, myths and rituals, primitive power and economy, the forms of submission so essential to states, the ethnocentrism of Marxist anthropology, the abstractions of structuralism, and war and the warrior in primitive societies, we are left with an evolving view that his sudden death in 1977, at the age of 43, cut off.

How much of this anthropology has taken to heart since then, and refined or refuted, is not for me to say. I am no expert. But when reading Clastres I am compelled by his thought, the evidence he presents, and his capacity for a kind of interpretation that raises issues that strike home because of their immanence. Primary among them is our need for alterity, our expectation, however problematic, that it is still present, and the growing impoverishment of our world whose diverse reflections may very well congeal to a single covalent image mediated by commodity exchange and hierarchical structures of governance.

Is this the legacy that we will leave to future generations? For Clastres, as I believe for most of us, it seems so. And yet, because he uses science well, and knows the difference between qualities of logic, which theory all too often appeals to, and experience, which vitiates theory of its abstractions, his views open a glimpse on alterity that may yet prompt us to discern ways to nourish it as we can — a vivacity that Clastres seeks even as his, and our time, constrains it. With the stunning image that flashed across our screens in May 2008 of a "last uncontacted tribe" in the Amazon jungle near the Peruvian border, in an aptly named "ethno-environmental protected area," there is little question that the road ahead is opaque.

Most important, I think, is Clastres' insistence that our failures of interpretation, when faced with primitive hunter-gatherer and agricultural societies, close the door on their worth as human organizations within the context of their needs and desires; based, as he often reiterates, not in subsistence but affluence, not in unity but differentiation, not in subservience but freedom (albeit a type of freedom that we find difficult to accept), and not in ignorance but with knowledge. Alienated individuality, as we know it in the West, is certainly not the point here.

War is also a central theme for Clastres. And why shouldn't it be? In primitive societies war is a global phenomenon, with very few exceptions. It is also a force that sustains it. His discussion thus not only turns the tables on anthropological views — that war comes from scarcity, that war advances hunting from animals to men, that war feeds a warrior class who make war on others as much to secure their servitude as the servitude of those in their own society, that war results from an exchange gone bad, and, finally, that war roots in a failure to sustain the peace — but also raises the issue in



*Archeology of Violence*  
Pierre Clastres  
Translated by Jeanine Herman  
SEMIOTEXT(E)  
335 pp., Softcover,  
\$15.95

terms of his subject with a directness that would be exceptional were his descriptions, drawn from his data, not so evident. What war is in primitive societies is not what it is for modernity. For the former it is prestige that empowers, and war becomes possible only when it embodies the collective will. For the latter, power provokes war, with prestige a concomitant. Here, the maintenance of power by war within and over the state and enemy states is a given. That war emboldens the modern state while preventing the establishment of a primitive state is something that Clastres also asks us to consider. That war is continuous, a kind of stasis that relates and differentiates them and us, is simply a statement of fact.

And while Clastres does not explicitly question these differences in the essays that comprise his "archeology," there is an implicit contrast drawn between primitive and modern societies, including what we have gained and lost through our history of, and political organization for, war.

Published in books and journals mostly during his life — from *Les Temps Modernes* and *L'Homme* to *Encyclopedia Universalis* — the chapters in this new edition chart junctures in the author's research whose interweaving themes I have mentioned.

Do we understand primitive society with greater acuity because of Clastres? Is our interpretation of Clastres sufficient to provoke further or different unknowns for research? What can we use of him to clarify our dilemmas in this second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Are protected areas, the transfigurations of art, political imagination or the kind of adventures that reveal our limits, differences and commonalities enough to stave off an accelerating homogeneity? Surely the *Archeology of Violence* will contribute to these, and other, debates.

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



Pierre Clastres

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## COUNTY JAIL (continued from page 21)

The men in that classroom are the primary audience for these poems. These men speak to one another, and I, reading them in Daldorph's collection, am eavesdropping. I overhear some fine work. (Of many more I could single out, I'll mention here just "Still Here" by Deuce, a well-crafted, tightly controlled capture of a confused and disjointed voice grasping for some forgotten bit of advice from his mother.) Some others depend heavily on context. But that's not a criticism; it's an acknowledgement of their specific power. With my modernist training, I may, sitting in my comfortable chair in my quiet home, balk at earnestly deployed fourteen couplets and other bits of naïve versification, but I know that I am not the audience for Michael Harper's "methamphetamine." In that room of people who know about addiction and the destruction it causes (again Danegrus Dane's "grief, anguish, disbelief & anger"), a poem in the voice of the drug itself maliciously delighting that it can create such pain and despair—such a poem must have washed waves of recognition across the room. Here's the contact Tyrone Edwards craved in his letter. To feel it, I've got to put myself in that room in that county jail in Kansas.

This is the value of *Douglas County Jail Blues*. It reminds me of the full humanity of people I might otherwise want to overlook. It reminds me how much poetry can mean.

*James D. Sullivan lives on the edge of a tiny town in Central Illinois and teaches English at Illinois Central College. He is currently working on a follow up to his book on poetry and art, On the Walls and in the Streets: American Poetry Broad-sides from the 1960s.*

# HOW TO FAKE ROMANCE...

*Ali Siemens*

One of the many helpful phrases tossed around as advice is, “fake it till you make it.” This idea holds value in today’s society, the workplace, and as Martin VanWoudenberg points out – in relationships. In his latest book, *How to Fake Romance When Your Love Is Real*, he focuses his messages and advice to the men in happy relationships who are not romance-savvy. Hey, you’re out there guys.

VanWoudenberg wastes no time describing the elusive idea of “romance.” Recognizing that the notion of being romantic is often intimidating and overwhelming, he works towards breaking down the kinetics so at the very least, men have more tools to ‘fake it.’ VanWoudenberg points out in his introduction that, “Romance is a bit like magic. Those who impress us with their ability to make coins go through tables and elephants disappear in the desert are not truly magical. They possess no inherent power. They simply fake magic better than we do.”

As a female reader I’ll offer the educated guess that not all men enjoy being romantic. They may view it as soft, often a waste of time. “Shouldn’t me just being with you be enough evidence that I am in love with you?” is a reaction I’ve heard in the past. VanWoudenberg sets up his book in a male-friendly fashion, including many humorous antidotes such as giving reasons why you *have* to be romantic and the benefits it has for both partners.

After giving sufficient reason as to why being romantic is a good idea, VanWoudenberg moves into his tips for the trade. The major selling feature of this book is how reader-friendly it is. Rather than presenting his suggestions in lengthy

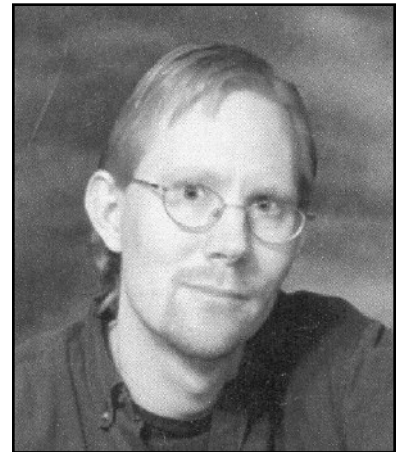


*How to Fake Romance When Your Love is Real*  
Martin VanWoudenberg  
iUniverse 2010  
193 pp. \$27.95

chapters, describing the intricate in’s and out’s on how to be a knight in shining armor, he offers 90 ideas in short snippets. Broken down into three categories, “Details,” “Pitfalls,” and “Extras,” each sub-category has one paragraph worth of advice and how-to’s. For example, “Idea 78: A note in a pocket” starts by describing the simple act of writing the romantic phrase “I love you” on a post-it-note. After this step is complete, the note is to be slipped into your partner’s pants, purse or jacket pocket for them to find later on in the day. Included on each page are also three barometers entitled, “financial cost,” “disaster risk,” and “time required.” The barometer fills up based on how much money is required for the idea, how much time is required and if there is any chance of disaster surfacing from the event. VanWoudenberg uses these images in a fun and simple way to look at an idea and decide whether or not it is worth carrying forward with. He also recognizes that bank accounts are not endless and both men and women have busy lives. With this information he shapes his tips for people who are busy, but still provides excellent advice.

Overall, VanWoudenberg has written a book that is useful for any man to read, whether they have a romantic bone or not. The ideas give an inside peek as to what women want and how to make both parties happy. Relationship problems are constant, but with the help from VanWoudenberg, you can have the romance department taken care of with no more than a few post-it-notes, and a dry-erase marker.

*Ali Siemens writes from B.C.’s Fraser Valley.*



*Martin VanWoudenberg*

# IT IS I, PATRICIA: AN ARTIST’S CHILDHOOD

*Linda Rogers*

This exquisitely produced little book, a portrait of the artist as a young woman, is dedicated “To all Young Dreamers of the Light.” I gave a copy to my artist/granddaughter, who has adored Pat Martin Bates from day one. And who doesn’t?

Bates is a purveyor of dreams with her ecstatic singing, her love of poetry, colour, the texture of paper, music and personal adornment. Her life, a work of art, defines painting with light.

In the epigraph to this illustrated story, Bates describes the death of her beloved father from an illness eventually erased by vaccination. How horrible to know a cure was so close and yet so far. Princess Precious Pearl, Daddy’s girl, knew she’d been blessed. Her parents sang, danced, painted and fantasized with their lucky children. Her father even left the Christmas tree in the basement so the young artist could hang precious things on its branches all year long; but one horrible day he disappeared into the earth and the lights in her incandescent world went out.

“Everything stopped then.”

I have heard these stories directly from Martin Bates, but the book has such immediacy that I was surprised again by her remarkable life. Credit is due to the careful listener who took it all in and transcribed it for us without disturbing the colour in the artist’s voice.

Loss has a long shadow, but light spills through the cracks. The PMB credo comes from advice taken reluctantly when she was a little girl bereft of parents (her



*It is I, Patricia, an artist's childhood*  
Pat Martin Bates with  
Joan Caldwell  
Hedgerow Press  
paper, 2010

mother disappeared into grief, leaving her children with relatives until she was on her feet again), older brother, baby sister she had been promised and her childish things, “Count only the happy hours and if you keep your face to the sun the shadows will fall far behind.”

“Capture the light,” the credo of the internationally acclaimed printmaker, is also the desideratum for raising resilient and creative human beings. Be a child. Share the joy. More than toys, words and paint and music are tools for life. Tooled up, the wise child transcends misery as time holds her green and dying. This is the message that repeats itself in chapters with titles taken from the Dylan Thomas poem “Fern Hill,” ironically the name of the cemetery where the members of the Martin family are interred

Joan Caldwell has put the Martin Bates childhood narrative together from interviews that took place over a handful of years. Her account has a rare biographical integrity which is invaluable to those who are lucky enough to have PMB in their lives and those who know her as a celebrated artist and teacher who has won accolades all over the world.

In this parable of a life transformed from chaos to celebration, nothing is lost in translation. Like the great Victoria painter Emily Carr, Pat Martin Bates moves easily



*Pat Martin Bates*

*(continued on page 33)*

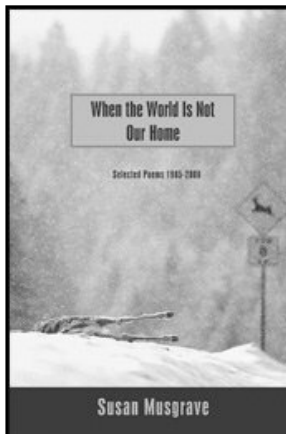
# READING SUSAN MUSGRAVE

Chelsea Thornton

When read together, these two separate volumes by Susan Musgrave, *When the World Is Not Our Home* and *Obituary of Light*, easily meld, in the mind, into one collection. The quiet wisdom and wonder of the later *Obituary* clearly grows out of the sharp, honest and occasionally brutal observations of life in *When the World Is Not Our Home*. While the earlier collection trembles with fierce strength and anger tempered by occasional moments of quiet acceptance and humour, the later collection trembles like a spider web in the wind, intricate but simple, delicate but strong.

*When the World Is Not Our Home* is largely a chronicle of how incredibly inhospitable the human landscape can be. It is an unsettling compilation of grief and violence, undoubtedly the stories of many real and imagined characters, but all told with the same poetic voice so that the stories begin to feel like the chronicle of one person's many tragedies. This unification of suffering makes the anthology's stubborn strength seem all the more defiant: "I'm here for the duration. / Grief's never had it so good." ("Here it Comes – Grief's Beautiful Blow-Job")

The true strength of *When the World Is Not Our Home* is Musgrave's ability to find moments of beauty hidden within the hurtful world she portrays: "I try/ to remember the immense beauty of pain" ("Mute Swans"). It is the tension between these two realities, the world of beauty and the world of pain, that gives the poems the ability to arrest the reader, to demand stillness and attention. In "The Way We Watch for Her," a mother describes the grave of her child as "only / a mound just out of reach under the



*When the World Is Not Our Home*  
Susan Musgrave  
Thistledown Press



Susan Musgrave

nettles / and wild peppermint," and we are caught by the opposition of the grave and growth, mesmerized by both beauty and sorrow.

Also included in the anthology is "Water Trembling at the Rim: The Process of Revision," an engaging discussion of the process of poetic revision that considers not only Musgrave's own process, but those of Jane Hirshfield, Donald Hall, and Galway Kinnell.

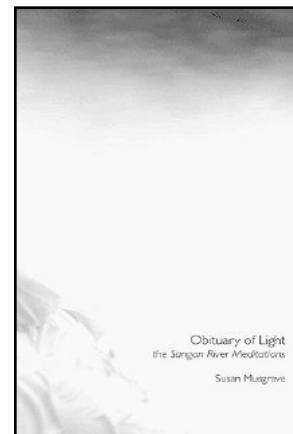
In *Obituary of Light: The Sangon River Meditations*, Musgrave chooses to sorrow quietly and beautifully. The brutal portrayal of pain and cruelty that characterizes her other recent collection is absent here, replaced instead with a meditative tone:

*The brightest stars are not always  
in the mood to sing. Pain  
is simply there, like bread rising,  
like driftwood, and the sun in the garden  
window. There is no place  
to take shelter  
but yourself. "Summer x"*

Much of *Obituary of Light* assumes a form similar to a Zen koan – small, unanswerable questions or contradictions designed to further open the mind: "Is it the flags/ that flutter now, or the wind?" (Fall v). The empty space on each page is needed to accommodate the deep well of thoughts the short verses evoke.

Through the collection's quiet, mindful acceptance of sorrow, Musgrave has managed to suck the pain out of it. Sorrow simply becomes another way to experience beauty. She closes with "We are the broken heart / of this world." (Fall xv) In light of the rest of the book, this feels more like a comfort than a condemnation.

Chelsea Thornton writes from Mission, B.C. She reviewed *What Species of Creature* in PRRB, Spring 2009.



*Obituary of Light: the Sangon River Meditations*  
Susan Musgrave  
Leaf Press

## "IT DOESN'T GET ANY EASIER"

Carol Ann Sokoloff

A good book of poetry can be an excellent companion – a conversation you tune into that captures your attention in surprising ways. The poet's voice lives in your consciousness, reflecting and expanding on your own experience. Susan Musgrave's recent volume *Origami Dove*, her fifteenth and the first in ten years, is one such book. Organized in four parts, each with a different style and voice, the collection brings together Musgrave's writing from the past decade, including work published in anthologies and chapbooks, as well as poems in the voice of street women used in documentary film. Covering a diverse range of tone and stylistic approaches, the volume is united by the theme of loss, handled with a mastery of craft that allows the poet to deeply penetrate experience while maintaining a wry detachment. Musgrave finds the poetry in sorrow, the humour in grief and the redeeming power of nature to comfort and heal. Behind the work is the challenge of a personal life left in pieces with the incarceration for robbery of Musgrave's husband, author Stephen Reid.



*Origami Dove*  
Susan Musgrave  
McClelland & Stewart  
128 pages, \$18.99

Musgrave is a tour guide down the dark passages of life's edges, but the quality of absence is universal and we find ourselves in familiar territory. She has travelled this road many times, it appears, approaching despair's oblivion only to be rescued by the act of poetry itself.

Part One of *Origami Dove* is called "Madagascar Vanilla" and consists of ten poems of loss – loss of the promise of romance and family, loss of an ex-husband to an overdose, loss of a father and the shattering of belief and loss of a first love. The collection opens with the poem "Magnolia" the first line of which, "Another Valentine's Day behind bars..." takes the reader directly into the poet's present where only memory – of rain, earth, pregnancy, a daughter's birth and those first merciful years – is offered as a path out of darkness. Darkness



Susan Musgrave. photo: Bruce Stotsebury



and light run through these poems, as does sorrow and weeping, but the poet also asks,

*Don't we stop  
grief from cutting deeper, sometimes  
with our tears?*

The section concludes with "Understanding the Sky" where a visitation by ravens awakens the poet and draws her into the darkness until an encounter with a snow owl initiates a moment of grace:

*...The going  
doesn't get any easier, but by any name  
I'd miss the wind too much to be  
parted from this life for even one hard winter.*

In Part Two of the book *Obituary of Light, the Sangam River Meditations* Musgrave pays homage to Chinese, Persian Japanese and Ojibway traditions in epithets preceding four nature-based poems, reflecting the seasons. Each consists of a series of short poems in which Musgrave proves surprisingly adept at evoking the time-less through the sparse approach – short lines and sim-



*Susan Musgrave on Haida Gwaii. photo: Stephanie Gillis*

ple language – of these traditions. It is not a style I normally associate with the witty, confessional work of past volumes but sparseness becomes Ms. Musgrave. Perhaps the sorrow of her years and the solace found in nature have brought her to the place of stillness to paint, in a few deft strokes, an untold world of truth and beauty.

*The stillness between tides and winds.  
snow blows through the emptiness  
where my thoughts have been. (Winter vi)*

Because it is a style I greatly appreciate, this particular section, from a chapbook of the same name published by Leaf Press, is my favourite of the book.

But for those who prefer Musgrave's reliably thought-provoking and urbane anecdotal approach, Part Three, "Random Acts of Poetry," will not disappoint. Included in this section is the CBC-commissioned "Rest Area: No Loitering, and other Signs of the Times," broadcast New Year's Eve 1999 and "Thirty-Two Uses for Al Purdy's Ashes," from a previous chapbook, *Twenty-Eight Uses for Al Purdy's Ashes* (Hawthorne Society). Replete with obscure and obvious references to the elder poet's life and work, graduate students will have a field-day with the latter. I especially enjoyed the poem entitled "Women Poets from Antiquity to Now: An Anthology." Preceded by a curious note in parentheses explaining the title as "a last gift from Al Purdy, his way of saying that he considered me to be a bona fide poet(ess)," it begins:

*By the time I reach the Sumerians*

*I have grown weary of our suffering...  
continuing,  
I want to say, buck up, act like a man...  
We ache, gain weight and yearn for that  
fearful day when fresh love shows up and we  
can crush it to death before it dies  
of natural causes...  
and ending with a sobering,  
We prayed to a God who lied... Ah, men.*

"Bona fide poet(ess)" indeed.

*Origami Dove* concludes with "Part Four: Heroines" a series of poems based on conversations with heroin-addicted sex trade workers from Vancouver's Downtown East Side. Created as narration for Stan Feingold's documentary of the same name, the poems demonstrate Musgrave's ease with voice – her own, another's and the place where they join. Writing in the

first person, Musgrave uses her pen as an acupuncture needle in the energy meridians of these women's lives. The poet celebrates the sheer survival of these unwanted children who grew to be addicted women. And once again, redemption occurs through the act of poetry.

Susan Musgrave has led a daring life and paid the cost in tears. *Origami Dove* harvests the difficult wisdom of the breaking heart, but as the poet writes, "A broken heart/ is an open heart..." and the folded paper dove of the book's title manages to soar despite the pull of gravity. "The going doesn't get any easier," Musgrave states on more than one occasion, but suggests that the art of poetry makes the journey worthwhile. A work of maturity and depth, *Origami Dove* is a triumph of craft, voice and the human spirit.

*Carol Ann Sokoloff is an author, poet, jazz vocalist and songwriter. Her jazz CD Let Go! is now available.*

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# THE ETHNOGRAPHER'S WORKSHOP

Peter Grant

This charming, eccentric — possibly unique — portrait of a First Nations storyteller begins with an abortive helicopter ride in search of a mythic bird. The excursion starts in the Pemberton Valley, in the Coast Mountains some 120 kilometres north of Vancouver. The day's events are recounted in a mosaic of narratives that include verbatim transcripts of conversations — the authors seem always to have a tape recorder running.

Charlie Mack, the 88-year-old guide, comes across at first as impulsive and given to very expensive mood swings. Why does he abruptly cancel a landing on a nearby mountaintop? Fear. The mountain is by tradition a “monster,” a generator of ferocious windstorms that can sweep the very rocks away.

In *Lil'wat World* we learn that Charlie Mack regards such legends absolutely literally. The mountain is really, literally a monster. A vast gulf separates his world from the bustling resort of Whistler, scarcely 25 km south of Pemberton. It's not just a difference of geography. His consciousness, vividly informed by a wealth of tradition, is utterly alien to city folks'. Is it beyond our understanding? This book makes the trying seem worthwhile.

The day of the helicopter ride comes to a peaceful conclusion in a campground by scenic Duffey Lake, where Charlie Mack tells the legend of the Copper Canoe. Here's the beginning of that story:

A long time ago, some time ago—long before White people were here in this country—some Indians were serious training into be a doctor [shaman; Indian doctor]. Doctor to cure sick person. And he was training, some Indians were training themselves to win something—a bow and arrow, things like that, and a canoe. They were training themselves to have a canoe. So they trained themselves for four years. Then he pulled out, pulled a Copper Canoe from the water, from where he was training. And he used that Copper Canoe.

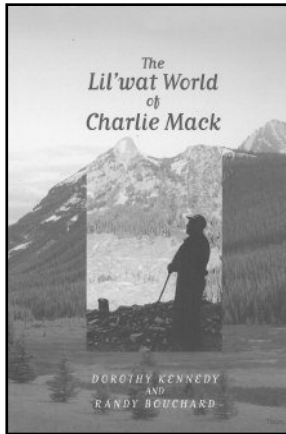
“What we have in this story,” the authors explain, “is an epic of the delineation of national territory, beginning at the glacial headwaters of the Lillooet River.” Their transcription of Mack's campfire tale gives scope to the informant's true voice. It is accompanied by a map and key identifying the places along the journey of the Copper Canoe.

Lil'wat territory does not, as the name implies, include the town of Lillooet, on the Fraser River where it drains the eastern ranges of the Coast Mountains. “Lil'wat,” says Charlie Mack, is “a Squamish word for the place where the three Rivers come together: Birkenhead River, Lillooet River and Green River” — roughly, the valley between Pemberton and Mount Currie. The so-called Lillooet nation, now usually rendered as the *St'at'imc*, comprises the lower *St'at'imc* (the Lil'wat) and the upper *St'at'imc*, people of the plateau who live near Lillooet. Both are grouped linguistically with the Interior Salish.

The reader encounters a narrative full of rough edges and tangential asides. It's not an easy read, but the rough and circuitous character of the book is a good thing. This is an education for the urbane and a corrective to the easy assumption that we know our region pretty well.

Over 235 pages Mack's unpolished storytelling accumulates a larger meaning. Its significance derives partly from the authors' interpretations of the texts, filling in anthropological detail about the Lil'wat nation and providing historical and geographic context. But there's more to this unusual book, I suspect, than interpretation.

Consider the same authors' *Lillooet Stories*, published in BC Archives' Sound



*The Lil'wat World of Charlie Mack*  
Dorothy Kennedy and Randy Bouchard  
Talonbooks, 2010



In 1972 Randy Bouchard (center) and Dorothy Kennedy founded the BC Indian Language Project

Heritage series in 1977. The two works cover much the same ground, but comparison of the contents reveals that *Lil'wat World* greatly extends and deepens the material in *Lillooet Stories*. Some of the earlier stories reappear, supplemented with background information and personal anecdote about the storytellers. Another significant difference is that *Lillooet Stories* consists entirely of translated recordings in the native tongue, whereas the bulk of Charlie Mack's stories in *Lil'wat World* are later tellings in English. (More than one quarter of the text, however, consists of new translations of early recordings.)

Between *Lillooet Stories* and *Lil'wat World* lies a wealth of research. Dorothy Kennedy and Randy Bouchard are independent ethnographers. Kennedy holds a doctorate in socio-cultural anthropology from Oxford University; Bouchard is a linguist trained at the University of California at Berkeley. They hail from Victoria and have been partners for more than forty years. Much of their work has been in support of land claims and treaty negotiations. They are also the proprietors of the BC Indian Language Project. Among its productions is the seminal *Indian Myths and Legends from the North Pacific Coast of America*, the long-awaited, lavishly annotated 700-page English translation of Franz Boas's 1895 compilation from some 25 traditions, published by Talonbooks in 2002. Kennedy and Bouchard, although too little appreciated in their own domain, are giants in the field of ethnography.

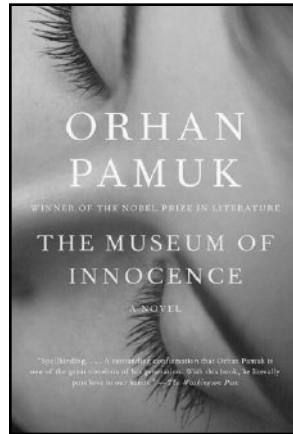
In *Lil'wat World* the authors the layman reader few concessions. On the first page of the opening chapter we are confronted with the name of a mysterious bird: *quwqwsmtáxen*. A rank outsider might prefer the transliterated names in *Lillooet Stories*, where *St'at'imc* is rendered as *STLA-tlei-mu-wh*, the stress falling on the (capitalized) first syllable. But it's a moot point — this is not a book designed to be read aloud. (Worth knowing, but not internally evident, is that the orthography employed in *Lil'wat World* was innovated by Bouchard and his associates in the BC Indian Language Project.)

The true significance of *Lil'wat World* can be gleaned by distinguishing *report* and *performance* as ways of representing First Nations stories. The difference is explained in the introduction to *The Squamish and the Lillooet*, one of four volumes published by Talon in 1978 as *The Salish People*, *The Local Contribution of Charles Hill-Tout*. A report is a simple retelling, whereas performance includes “the transcriber's interest in the details of the story” and in “the circumstances of the telling.” Much ethnographic literature, including *Lillooet Stories*, is of the first kind. Performance seeks, as far as possible within the linearity of prose, to bring the subject to life. “Ethnographers,” a university website explains, “seek to gain what is called an ‘emic’ perspective, or the ‘native's point(s) of view’ without imposing their own conceptual frameworks.” The astonishing success of *Lil'wat World* in achieving this goal is also, I believe, the key to its originality.

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

# A MAP OF SORTS: A LETTER FROM ISTANBUL

Linda Rogers



*Museum of Innocence*  
Orhan Pamuk  
Random House  
Vintage Canada, 2010.

I enjoy being lost in Turkey, a country where every stranger will give you directions but no one will tell you where to go. The universal prescription “five hundred meters, inshallah,” means, I finally learned, every place from here to the moon because it is permission to walk the longest possible distance from home to mosque on holy days. Five hundred meters is half the circumference of a village and Turkey is all villages, whether on top of a mountain or in a city of thirteen million.

This is my wandering time, but what about the Turks?

It is only since Attaturk, the end of the Ottoman Empire and British sovereignty, that Turks have been identifiable by last names that designate profession or provenance. Give a taxi directions (from whence on one knows; it is all surmised) and his guess is as good as yours. Many streets lack names, many houses are known by several numbers or the name of the first owner and many go forward only because to stop is to die, especially in traffic.

The streets of Istanbul, crowded with vendors of fresh fruit, vegetables and fish, Ottoman princes, the descendants of families that have forgotten how to be useful in the world, and refugees from the impoverished east crowding to the Promised Land on the European boundary, are a navigational nightmare. Only monuments like the Galata Tower, Attaturk and Galata Bridges and the architectural wonders of Sultanahmet, the Aya Sophia, Topkapi Palace and The Blue Mosque define the skyline. Only the ferribots crossing the waters leave and arrive on time.

“If you’ve a date in Constantinople,” the song says, “she’ll be waiting in Istanbul.”

Many young Turks, fearing jihad, erosion of democracy and the relentless grind of bottom feeding, want to get out. *Göte giren semsiye açılmaz*, they say. “How can you open an umbrella if it is up your ass?”

This is the world of Orhan Pamuk, a phenomenal mystery set in ruin and beauty, the remains of occupation and imperial glory where East met West and everyone got lost. Pamuk is one of the “privileged.” He grew up in a house that bears the name of his ancestors. His is the legacy of Byzantine anachronism, which is as often as not the prerogative to be and do nothing, to wait like an old beauty for the elixir of life to revivify her moldering body.

“I am Turkish” my friends say, and shrug, an excuse for being late or stepping off the curb in front of a dolmus, the Turkish mini busses with indeterminate destinations, heaven or hell. My friends are musicians, writers, film makers and publishers. Many of them know Pamuk, but they are not certain where he is. Perhaps in Beyoğlu, Maybe in New York, possibly at his favourite café; but if you see him there, don’t speak



View of Istanbul from the window of Orhan Pamuk



Orhan Pamuk

to him. He hates being recognized.

Is it possible that being a Nobel Laureate is entitlement to misanthropy? Having attained the pinnacle, do these men and women have permission to guard the summit?

The first time I came to Turkey, four summers ago, I had just read *Snow*, Pamuk’s encoded novel about the headscarf women who were committing suicide after being ordered by the secular government to uncover their heads. The story, narrated by a neurotic poet sexually intrigued by two sisters who represent the secular and religious division in Turkey, is really an examination of the political and religious issues that simmer in every pot of lentil *çorba*, the national soup. I wanted to know why Ka, the narrator, a neutralized Turk, product of the Attaturk era when religion and politics had ostensibly been separated for the greater good, thought he heard God in the silence of snow.

That is the silence that resonates in all the noisy traffic of Istanbul and all the voices in Pamuk’s fiction. It is what you hear in the dome of the Aya Sofya, where a concerned, recently uncovered seraph peers out from a pendentive, and what is heard in the cistern under the basilica where, until recently, local homeowners fished from holes in their basements.

It is what the narrator of Pamuk’s recent novel *The Museum of Innocence* heard in the moment after his fiancé drove into a tree and died: death and maybe resurrection. Memory is the powerful aphrodisiac that makes a mockery of love in this story of impossible obsession. The pages smell like a magnificent *sarayı* (palace), room after room decorated with worn carpets and dusty curtains, everything eaten by moths and vulnerable to sunlight. Copulation is possible in such rooms, but not procreation.

Kemal Bey is a mercantile prince who although the manager of a family business is not identifiable by his work. He is in trade which in a country at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, is not necessarily a stigma in the leisured class so long as there is wealth. To appear to work at it is.

Engaged to a girl of his own class, Kemal is in love with another, a distant cousin of humbler provenance. Incest and impossibility lead him to a deeper paralysis. He has been making love to a corpse, his dead dream and the possible death of social progress.

At over five hundred pages, the novel is a painful and tedious catalogue of futility. As Kemal Bey, the honorific a mockery of his gentility, gathers phenomenal objects – cigarette butts that touched the lips of his inamorata, her father’s false teeth – for his museum of innocence, the reader becomes impatient. Is there no end to this? Children on a long journey ask, “When will we get there?” This is the question posed by Orhan Pamuk and the answer may or may not be found in the thousands of apparently tedious pages he has written.

(continued on page 28)

# THE GHOST BRUSH

Apis Teicher

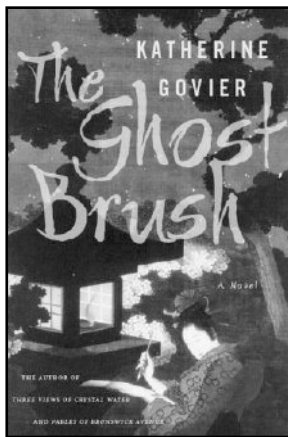
With its poignant exploration of the paradoxes that govern an artist's life, Katherine Govier's *The Ghost Brush* offers a brilliant insight into the life of a historical figure who has been virtually erased. This latest work marks a striking departure from her last novel, *Three Views of Crystal Water*. Although both are based in Japan and deal in depth with societies in the throes of transition, this new work is more visceral and gripping. While *Ghost Brush* is nowhere near as lyrical or achingly beautiful as *Crystal Water*, one gets the impression that this is exactly the effect that Govier was after. The novel is told in the first person from the point of view of Katsushika Ei, daughter of the renowned Ukiyo-e artist and printmaker, Hokusai.

The book follows the life of Oei as she develops as a person and an artist, the devotedly loyal companion of her father. A woman unlike most during that time, Oei is alienated by her gender and her artistic temperament as she struggles to define who she is and how she will express her art. Like Govier's, most of her work seems to be a search for a faithful, rather than a beautiful depiction of the world around her. *The Ghost Brush* is a candid -and at times harsh- exploration of the artistic obsession and frequent extremes that it can drive the individual toward. Oei's search for transcendence and honesty drives her interactions and her artistic development, but her incapability to compromise (much like her father's) drives her to a painful isolation.

Govier's exploration of the quandary posed to the artist is brilliant. Using Oei's reconstructed life, she ruthlessly dissects the very essence of *Ars Gratia Artis* and focuses on the numerous other issues that crop up as a result. Her protagonist can no more stop painting than she can stop breathing; this sets her apart from most of her contemporaries and even some of her peers. Ever attempting to balance the need for commercial work as a source of income with the more demanding need for personal self-expression, Oei comes to embody many artists that came before her and more who will follow. Although there is the facile temptation to see the gender and class divisions in the novel as the main source of conflict, Govier underplays those themes. While they are discussed and explored within the story, the author makes it a point (by way of Hokusai as much as of Oei) to show that the greater conflict is one that isn't gender specific but rather something much more universal.

*The Ghost Brush's* ultimate view of the dilemmas that Oei and other artists face seems decidedly brutal, and one can only hope that is an echo of Oei's own point of view rather than the author's. It is profoundly disheartening to see the protagonist eventually defeated and destroyed by her inner struggles as much as the outside forces working against her. In effect, the general consensus seems to be that by virtue of *being* an artist, Oei is doomed not to achieve the recognition or transcendence she so ardently seeks. Destined never to be understood by those that don't share her obsession, neither is she entirely personally fulfilled. Tragically, as her own need to create takes over her psyche, the artist becomes an almost willing participant in her own destruction with but little hope of redemption.

The book is not without its issues. Unlike its predecessor, *The Ghost Brush* comes across as a choppy and disjointed read. The effect appears to be deliberate. Govier tells



*The Ghost Brush*  
Katherine Govier  
HarperCollins. 2010



Katherine Govier

Oei's story from a first person point of view, and her narrative style echoes the abrupt and choppy style of thinking and acting we come to associate with the protagonist's own personality. Yet this ambitious stylistic choice almost always succeeds. On the other hand, the narrative voice also remains the same regardless of age, and as Oei's tale chronicles her life from birth to death it eventually falls flat. Halfway through the novel there is also a section where the novel deals almost exclusively another character's life, and the effect is jarring and disruptive.

Govier's occasional slips when it comes with her experimentation with points of view can be forgiven. The story forges ahead under its own power, regardless. In the end, Oei's own tale is fascinating enough to keep the reader hooked. Beyond that her greatest hopes and challenges transcend those of the usual "artist versus the world" variety, and can be explained as something universally craved: the individual's need to be acknowledged, and beyond that, understood.

*Apis Teicher is a freelance writer and illustrator based out of Vancouver. Her novel Winterborn is now out in print and e-book. Her art can be found on Baen's Universe. She reviewed Three Views of Crystal Water in Fall, 2006.*

## LETTER FROM ISTANBUL (continued from page 27)

*Having become - with the passage of time - the anthropologist of my own experience, I have no wish to disparage those obsessive souls who bring back crockery, artifacts and utensils from distant lands and put them on display for us, the better to understand the lives of others and our own.*

There are times you want to tug the yarak hanging from his emotionally and intellectually impotent narrators, but there is no point in being impatient with them or with the country that may be revealing by providing, failing a map, an exemplary pattern of endurance for other countries with a conflicted heritage.

"Pamuk's sentences are too long. You are lucky to read him in English. His translator, Maureen Freely, writes better than he does," one Ottoman prince said to me recently. On the feribot from Karaköy to Eminönü, a headscarf girl introduced herself to me, "You look so Turkish eating simit and drinking tea on the feribot." I responded by asking her, as I ask everyone, "Why do Turks hate Pamuk?"

"They don't understand him," she said.

Someone else told me there are many good Turkish writers. Why doesn't the English speaking world embrace all of them, and not just one? It is hard for writers to acknowledge that cream rises. Writers are all supreme narcissists. The fact is that readers recognize the integrity of Pamuk's writing. He is neither the pawn of some great literary conspiracy or a mediocrity as charged. He is a storyteller who understands the frustration of stasis, the condition of his milieu and the quiet desperation we read in the face of every man and woman denied the human right to evolve.

The manager of Antilop Brasserie, a kitap (book) Café in a suburb of Istanbul, says Turks are still angry with Pamuk because he acknowledges the massacre of Armenians, a position that had him charged with "insulting Turkishness." His forthrightness added to his description of the inertia of a secular society born in an environment of religious disagreement, does not ingratiate him to his fellow citizens.

The truth hurts. Pamuk, who has mesmerized the world, annoys his countrymen. Like women of a certain age who no longer look at themselves in shop windows, many Turks don't want to acknowledge what is there to be seen. Refusal is paralysis, the condition that has recently been confronted in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, where a new generation of revolutionaries has overcome fear and embrace freedom.

Ostensibly, the Turks are free, in many ways a model of social democracy for their neighbours; but they are still burdened with fear of the past.

*The Museum of Innocence* resonates in the personal cavities where a love deficit prevents the advancement of the personal and social dialectic. How can we be kind if we are not kindred? Love is the grease of change and change is essential to growth. When fear is overcome, freedom is possible. This what Pamuk reveals in his catalogue of grief, a map of sorts. Welcome to Byzantium.

*Linda Rogers is a regular contributor to the PRRB. Her recent book Muscle Memory was voted Monday Magazine's poetry book of the year.*



# WHO WAS A T' SERSTEVENS?

*Alexander Nouvel*

Everything is connected.

I first met Brooklyn poet Geoffrey Cruickshankhagen buckle (real name) at Shakespeare & Co. in Paris. He showed up out of nowhere and asked me what I was reading. *Great Dream of Heaven*, I told him, by Sam Shepard. "In this story, Sam is exploring old hangouts in Paris, 1971, and he's hoping to brush up against the ghost of Blaise Cendrars but he ends up in a bar fight with two French queens and a Scandinavian prostitute."

"So you read Cendrars, too."

"He's the man. But right now I'm concentrating on the travel writer A. t'Serstevens."

"What the heck is a tea Sir Stevens?"

A few years after this Shakespearian conversation, Geoffrey Cruickshankhagenbuckle writes a piece on this Cendrars-t'Serstevens connection published in *Jacket Magazine*, becoming the first person to note the connection between the two writers. Cendrars is the man described by John Dos Passos as the "Homer of the Transsiberian."

In his book *My friend Henry Miller*, Alfred Perles recalled the first encounter between Miller and Cendrars: *It was the meeting of two kindred spirits. Two cosmic brothers. The affinity between the two men corroborated a truth of great import, namely, that there exist in the universe natural brothers, beings belonging to the same species, having the same wave-length, magnitude and caliber and they may not all come from the same planet but they have their home within the metropolitan area of the cosmos.*"

Perhaps A. t'Serstevens read these pages when, in 1970, aged 85, nine years after Cendrars' death, he finally decides to write his memoir, *L'Homme que fut Blaise Cendrars*, published in 1972. This 'cosmic liason' with Cendrars began when they were both starting their careers. A. t'Serstevens. It's a bizarre name for a writer or for anyone else. Are you sure I'm not making up this guy? Hell, I recall a story Jim Christy told me about how when a magazine in Canada asked him to do an essay on the greatest writer of the Twentieth Century. Christy agreed and when they asked him who he was going to choose, he answered Blaise Cendrars. The editors thought he was making the guy up.

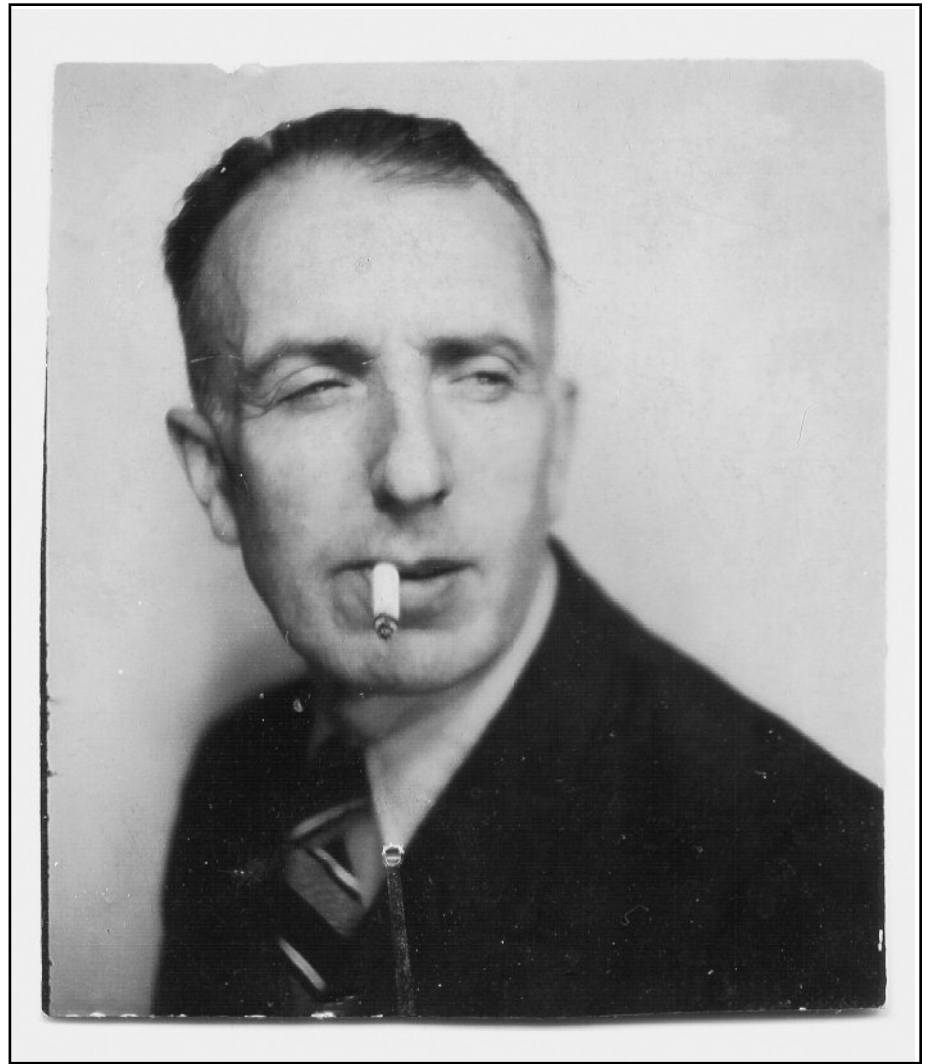
He wasn't and I'm not making this one up either.

Albert t'Serstevens (1885-1974) is the Captain Nemo of French Literature. He was primarily known for his travel books, short stories and adventure novels. But today his name survives only because of his memoir of Cendrars.

From the very start, they established an intertextual game between themselves, a secret collaboration with cryptic codes, in Cendrars' own words, a *?curieux chasse-croise*". And God created the verb *boulinguer* which is slang, meaning to travel all over the world. Cendrars took it from a t'Serstevens travel book. It isn't Cendrars traveling so much as it is t'Serstevens, his "*oldest partner in Letters*" as Cendrars innocently put it. And his old partner is sailing around Hawaii and Tahiti with his young wife Amandine, while he, Blaise, is stuck in his kitchen typing his memoirs before the End. "Travel for me, Amigo t'Ser" he is saying, "because you're my alter-ego, my shadow. And as we have agreed, I will keep it a secret: *je ne soufflé mot.*" Those are the last words



*Blaise Cendrars and A. t'Serstevens*



*A. t'Serstevens*

of Cendrars' Venetian story that he dedicates to t'Serstevens. They give us a hint of what's been going on between them. What they mean is: I do not whisper a word...of our mutual traffic...in words.

To understand how all this began, let's find out about t'Serstevens. The name belongs to a heraldic clan of the Estienne's, which is still active and wealthy today in Brussels. The "t" apostrophe is similar to the "de" in Guy de Maupassant. His ancestors were printers and his father worked in the King's royal administration. His second wife gave birth to Albert in 1885, and the boy grew up in a household of noisy half-brothers and sisters. He seeks refuge in a bathtub in the attic where, with his dog beside him, he reads. His uncle Theodore is the judge who supervised the famous "Amigo Shooting" between Verlaine and Rimbaud in 1873. In the movie *Total Eclipse* Rimbaud is played by Leonardo DiCaprio and Verlaine by David Thewlis; screenwriter Christopher Hampton is Theodore t'Serstevens.

At eighteen, Albert and friends create a phalanstere which they call The Kropotkin Campus. He reads Gorki, Marx, Bakunin and Fourier. Later, he will write a novel, *Un Apostolat*, about his early politics and subsequent disillusionment.

Soon he finds himself married with two kids. When his father dies, Albert leaves his family and takes off for Egypt. He meets an English architect; they buy a boat, recruit some women and cruise down the Nile. In a 1972 interview, he recalls this first trip: "The pyramids? To me they were just a bunch of stones. I was young and did crazy things but I'd go through all those dumb acts ten times over if I could."

In Paris in 1911, he begins his writing career as a journalist on a theater magazine. By this time, he is 26, living in a cheap hotel room and enjoying the bohemian life. He befriends the likes of Mac Orlan and Francis Carco. He marries an actress from the Comedie Francaise, Marcella Schmitt, who will later appear in Jean Epstein movies. It is in 1912 at one of those Roger Stattuck banquet readings that t'Serstevens meets another newcomer in town, Blaise Cendrars.

As t'Serstevens wrote: "Blaise showed up on stage and from a distance looked like

Jesus himself with long dark blond hair and the face of a Los Angeles gigolo.”

Blaise reads *Easter in New York* and Albert likes what he hears. In Cendrars he finds the living prototype that his own creative mind was looking for: the Poet and the Adventurer.

But it is not until another year has passed that they meet again and the click happens. Two piercing eyes glanced into two piercing eyes. They caroused the music halls with easy going Yvonne Printemps girls. They danced down Montmartre streets like dingedoodies. Once they were so broke they found a portrait Modigliani had done of Cendrars and sold it to an art dealer for a thousand francs. “It now belong to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and is worth a billion,” t’Ser joked in his memoirs of Blaise.

The War separates the two. Cendrars comes back without his right arm. t’Serstevens goes on the tramp and in Almaf begins to write again. A few years later he moves to a Parisian apartment on Ile Ste. Louis, which will be home for the remainder of his life. A journalist described it, thusly: “He decorated it patiently, slowly, with all the treasures brought back from his travels; precious books with ancient bindings, frigates that sailors of old times would spend hours carving, boats imprisoned in the silence of bottles, Chinese marionettes, shell chests from which emerged mutiny songs and ivory slippers of late marquises.”

In a second hand bookstore in Corpus Christi, Texas in 2003, I found a copy of t’Serstevens’ *The Sentimental Vagabond*, translated by Whittaker Chambers, no less. From the jacket copy: *It is the story of Baccio Cardi and his quest for the unattainable. Bacio is young and impecunious; he wants to write a book. His publisher gives him an advance which he squanders. He meets with various adventures, is cast into jail, escapes and falls in love with a Botticelli blond named Erigone. He loses her but finally encounters a wandering quack, Salvatore Palumbo, a most engaging fellow, who takes the author under his wing and guides him, and who becomes his companion of the road in his delightful and madcap adventures*

You will note that Baccio Cardi carries Blaise Cendrars’ initials. His physiognomy, however, matches t’Serstevens’ own. It is Salvatore (he who saves) who looks like Blaise.

In the mid-1920s through the Thirties, Cendrars and t’Serstevens formed a trio with Abel Gance. The two writers were the first and perhaps the only people to see the eight-hour uncut version of Gance’s triptych *Napoleon*. According to t’Serstevens, after the movie finished, Cendrars said, “It’s fantastic, Abel. Revolutionary. But, old pal, eight hours without a drink, that’s torture. How about an intermission and a few cuts here and there, eh?”

Gance agreed and broke open a jeroboam of Chateau Mouton-Rothschild.

From this time on t’Serstevens divided his career between his voyages and the writing of his books. His success reached its peak with the novel *L’Or du Cristobal* in 1936; it is dedicated to Blaise Cendrars, “Poet of Adventure” and was eventually made into a movie, as was *L’Amour autour de la maison*. His novel *Taia*, which takes place in Yugoslavia and the islands of Nouka-Hiva describes the assassination of Mary Vetsera. One of the characters in the story is Basile Fomitcheff; Basile being another anagram for Blaise.

t’Serstevens died in 1974. That same year Bernard Pivot inaugurates his first tv show for the literati, *Apostrophes*. Four years later, Pivot invites Charles Bukowski as a special guest but Buk, surrounded by French intellectuals and thoroughly pissed off, walks off the set. Those people Buk had to face that day are the same ones t’Serstevens had to deal with in the last years of his career. With all his true-to-life buddies dead, t’Ser must have felt very much alone.

Jim Christy, who I also met at Shakespeare & Co. in Paris where he was a guest reading his poetry, wrote a little book on Charles Bukowski. From my angle, Buk is sort of a continuation of Blaise, although a made-in-America, less wordly and less learned Cendrars. Incidentally, while traveling in Europe in 1972, Christy met Jean Buhler, one of Cendrars’ early biographers, and notes that the writer was in the company of a “princess”. Buhler is the very first to mention the “elephant’s friendship” between the two writers. Jim Christy could well have knocked at t’ Serstevens’ door and met the man himself and, perhaps, another princess. Maybe he did, one would

have to ask Jim about this.

Buhler showed Christy a photograph of Cendrars holding a coconut that had been from Tahiti by t’Serstevens. It had come by regular mail with a short message carved with a penknife: “Blaise, here’s one coconut that missed my skull from very close! Amandine sends you her love and I am your angel, A.t’S.”

A year after the Nazi Occupation ended, he and his young fiancée, Amandine, finally took off for Tahiti. Blaise who was then living in Aix-en-Provence, joined them in Marseilles for a bouillabaisse au-revoir. On the quay, the day of the ship’s departure, t’Serstevens asked him one last time:

—Blaise, come with us.

Cendrars answered, “No way, doucka. You know damn well I still have 33 volumes of memoirs to put down on paper but I sure hope a coconut crashes on your head!

From the 1950s to the 1970s, t’Serstevens was flying high; his career solidly built on the warm acclaim of the public. During these years numerous articles were written about him and his work. Since his death, however, he has slipped into obscurity.

A possible explanation may be politics. Ill-intentioned rumours have circulated that t’Serstevens was a right-wing anarchist. He wasn’t. All politicians sleep in the same bed, as far as he was concerned. “As long as they leave me alone,” he wrote to his friend Pierre Mac Orlan, “I don’t care what they do.”

It is true that he covered the Spanish Civil War for the right-leaning Gringoire newspapers but that doesn’t mean he had a picture of Franco in his back pocket. The newspaper chain also invited Cendrars to Spain. Blaise needed cash and action and accepted. Both of them were buccaneers who stood like trees against the wind.

So it goes.

If Cendrars had his American friend, Henry Miller, A. t’Serstevens had one as well: James Norman Hall who he met in Tahiti. And here’s another curiosity: Hall wrote novels in collaboration with another writer, Charles B. Nordhoff, most notably, *The Revolt of the Bounty*.

This thesis of mine about Cendrars and t’Serstevens, two names glued together, isn’t that fantastic after all, if we connect this idea with what Paul Briand, Jr. writes in the preface to his dual biography of Nordhoff and Hall:

*“They were the most dissimilar of men, of entirely different background, education, families, characters, personalities, motivations and talents; yet they merged in a kind of fusion, which radiated some of the most famous adventure stories ever told. But the most adventurous story of them all is the story, separate and together, of their own lives.”*

Fusion.

That’s the word I’ve been looking for.

With three hands and two minds in fusion, Cendrars and t’Serstevens are one.

But it is Blaise who is the legend. He even has a society dedicated to him and many people who dig him. Umberto Eco is one. Jean-Paul Belmondo another. Sam Shepard digs Cendrars. Jim Christy digs Cendrars. Patti Smith digs Cendrars. And I do, too. We were all born the same day. But whether it pleases us or not, one must understand this: Cendrars belongs to s’Serstevens. He is the first to have captured and celebrated the beatific Blaise many worship today. You cannot fully comprehend and dig all of the Blasé Cendrars labyrinth without having acknowledged A. t’Serstevens and his own secret jazz.

In 1961, shortly after Blaise Cendrars’ death, Jean Buhler mails a copy of his biography on the one-armed poet to Albert t’Serstevens who answers with a polite note ending with these words: “*With Cendrars now gone, I am the one amputated.*”

So it goes.

*Alex Nouvel studied and teaches at the Sorbonne. He lives in Paris.*

# SPRING WINDS: THE BIRTHING OF JAPAN'S NEW WOMEN'S POETRY

Trevor Carolan

As returning travellers will confirm, throughout the Asia-Pacific a tsunami of social and techno-transformation is unceasingly at work, directing outmoded Western notions of how Asia ticks toward the millennial trash bin. Odd therefore, how infrequently arrive the necessary antidotes to such shopworn myths as the Asian female as Suzie Wong, or Asia as the inscrutable Other. How welcome then comes the panache and sheer breadth of discovery to be found in this exquisite brace of women's poetry compilations from the Japanese edited & translated by Leza Lowitz.

The first major anthologies of contemporary Japanese women's poetry to arrive in English translation in quite a while, *Other Side River* and *A Long Rainy Season* offer a solid tribute to the depth and strength of Japan's women poets who – until now – have remained virtually unknown abroad. Lowitz has laboured fruitfully with Miyuke Aoyama and Akemi Tomioka in bringing to dramatic attention both the free verse, and the more traditional haiku and tanka forms still practiced avidly by Japan's contemporary women poets. And how delicious these translations are!

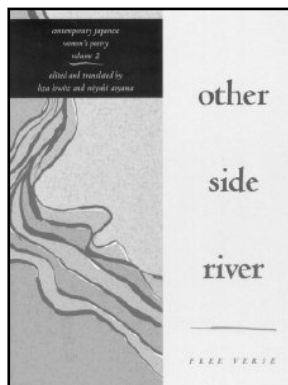
The deeper one reads the more absorbing is the enculturation provided by their poetic concerns—feminism, identity, emergence & constriction, sexuality, child-rearing, aging, existence. Lowitz and her collaborators demonstrate an intuitive sensibility regarding what qualifies among Japanese women poets, and their selections and interpreting skills are convincing.

Of the two volumes, the free verse in the most recently published *Other Side River* demands most attentive reading. Where the haiku and tanka forms of *A Long Rainy Season* may seem by-now exotically cozy to some, it is the former edition's free verse that presents us with the keenest evidence of how Japan's current crop of women poets is coming along. It should be communicated that no competition exists between the traditional and modern schools; any difference in approach lies simply in the individual poet's choice of tools. For some it is a matter of history. As Lowitz's enlightening introductory essay informs, free verse poetics are a fairly recent manifestation in Japanese writing; inevitably, the results are bound to be spotty in places. With that said, *Other Side River* offers us an impressive range of poetic subject and concern. The collection gathers offerings variously by thirty-six younger, mid-career, and honoured, older poets.

Saho Asada, a mother and *belle letterist*, kicks out the jams with "Viva Lesbians!", a funky howl in homage to newly-out and closet sisters alike. Ethnic Korean-minority women – the brutalized victims of Japan's loathsome wartime sexual slave brigades – are also saluted:

*When a young woman, a "comfort woman"  
escaped from the mental hospital  
after the war, she cried out  
I am Korean!  
I am really a Korean!*

*Let's keep our sanity and say,  
I am Korean!  
I am lesbian!  
Let's bring in a new age,  
Viva lesbians!*



**Other Side River:  
Contemporary Japanese  
Women's Poetry, Vol. 2**  
edited & translated by  
Leza Lowitz and  
Miyuke Aoyama  
Stone Bridge Press  
244 pp, 1995, \$14.00



Leza Lowitz

Not exactly what we've been conditioned to expect from Japanese women. Nor are the outsider voices who find themselves strangers in their birthland. In "A Windborne Postcard," Mieko Chikapp, a northern Ainu tribal frames her people's animist spirit of living holiness, declaring:

*everything on earth  
that has form  
has spirit ...  
when women who believed so embroidered  
searching for the image of spirit,  
they came to make the image of the living God  
each stitch made into peculiar abstract patterns  
becoming the image of spirit ...*

*I will send you a postcard  
with this Ainu pattern  
for the sake of these splendid women and men  
living and dying  
for love.*

Iro Kitadai, an illiterate *burakumin* social outcaste was seventy years old before she learned to write her own name. Less poet than transcendent elder, her appearance here owes to Lowitz's humanism: "Until now the sunset wasn't that beautiful," she writes; "But after having learned how to write ... I wish I had ten more years to live."

Ethnic Koreans Chuwol Chong and Kyong Mi Park work out their separate and communal bitch against Japan's cultural supremacist myth of "pure-bloodedness." In "Two Names," a complicated lance at the injustice of second "formal" Japanese names her people must use in officialdom, Chong's language is reminiscent of the Civil Rights struggles thirty-five years ago:

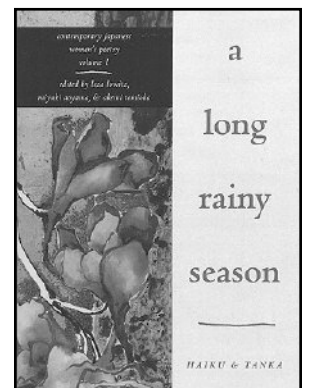
*I must be set free.  
Carrying my hell-name  
In my hands, on my shoulders ...  
Come, spring.  
Come soon.*

In "Chima Chogori," Park recalls the youthful shame familiar to young immigrant and second-generational ethnics everywhere at their elders' practice of continuing to display obvious badges of cultural otherness—in this case, wearing the flowing Korean gowns of the title. Now grown older, at the unlikely sighting of this dress on a stranger in a Tokyo underpass, she recalls like healing balm the courage of her ancestor spirits:

*"Its familiar scent rose like an affectionate look... I remember it clearly ...  
I was even too ashamed to walk with my grandmother/When she wore one./  
But for a very long time/ In that tunnel in Shinjuku/The dark blue  
folds/Opened happily to the wind/And I knew that you were me/And would  
always be."*

The most impressive arrival however, is Hiromi Ito writing in her forties from Kyushu. Her work here merits Ito as an important new international presence, and clearly establishes her as both descendent and spiritual heir to Kazuko Shiraishi, Japan's Beat-era wild thing who has helped shoulder the load for modern Japanese poetry abroad since Kenneth Rexroth introduced her to English more than twenty years ago. Her "Harakiri" is a flat-out kick in the pants to wanking male narcissism, and in "The Coyote" we are given a world-class fugue. Imbued with cagey East-West wisdom and pregnant with spooky tricksterism and heavy omen, it begins:

*My grandmother was a medium/My mother was a sorcerer/One aunt was a*



**A Long Rainy Season:  
Haiku & Tanka, Vol. 1**  
ed. & trans. by Lowitz,  
Aoyama, and Akemi  
Tomioka  
Stone Bridge Press  
200 pp. 1994, \$12.00

*geisha/Another had tuberculosis...All were beautiful/ And knew the magical rite ... With sake, rice and salt/ We lived in fear of snakes, water/ & the East.*



Hiromi Ito

With “Killing Kanoko” however, Ito goes in deeper. Mining the irresolvable dilemma of aborting a fetus in light of the Buddhist proscription against taking life, the poem explores medical procedure, toxemia, guilt, madness and anger. “*I myself have committed infanticide ...*” she writes, balancing this fate with the survival of another daughter, Kanoko. Almost hysterically her pain and swirling anxieties become a wailing mantra: “*Congratulations,*” they refrain. “*Congratulations on the destruction/Congratulations on the destruction ...*” Unrelenting stuff.

There’s more to stew on: Yufuko Shima’s “Fleeting Love” is as pagan as an island girl: “*...urged on by the sound of the snakeskin shamisen/my geta are growing impatient.*” And hauntingly lovely is the closure of Keiko Matsui Gibson’s epiphany for Kenneth Rexroth: “*Hope you take a long bath/ in eternally consoling moonlight.*”

Kazuko Shiraishi, whose eroto-mystic surrealism lends this free verse compendium its title, remains a towering presence in contemporary Japanese poetry. Rivalled in overall achievement only by the mainstream Shuntaro Tanikawa and wandering Zen bard Nanao Sakaki, the many strains and flavours in her work beggar interpretation. French symbolist, American Beat and MittelEuropean surrealist elements mesh harmoniously throughout her epic extravaganzas.

“*I am a bird today/I become a prayer ... Bye Bye blackbird,*” she calls in jazz cadence in “Bird.” Then in “Male Or Monkey Story” declaims,

*Bye Bye female—  
This is an outdated song  
women are bored and once again yawning  
since men sprinkled water on people’s consciousness  
the male’s been pushing on passionately  
toward elimination ...  
I’ll go back  
to the place I’ve kept nothing  
to bed ... it is then that  
I hold female inside male  
and in both sexes  
I begin to live for the very  
first time.*

Savagely original, there is simply no one else like Shiraishi. With her personal saga including hundreds of lovers and endless global voyages, Shiraishi’s charm still beckons as tantalizingly sweet as a dairymaid’s. Where the rag and bone shop of her mucous-laden auguries finds its source is anyone’s guess; the interested though, might look to the erotic/violent *Kojiki* myths, available in English as *A Record of Ancient Matters*.

It is the poet’s job to adventure and report. Some are content to explore as far as the fishpond; Shiraishi though has always stripped off for the long swim, knowing full well that in swimming shark-infested waters, sooner or later something’s bound to get bitten off. As the title piece, “Other Side River” shows, this marvellous poet is now writing at the mature zenith of her spellcraft. *Through many souls of the dead,* she begins,

*I push my way over to the other side river  
The forest the once-living died and reached  
I, this being who has never been born  
Make my way ...*

*In a hot muddy season  
Without eyes, mouth or brain  
My body was a shovel of the soul  
Kneeling before the King of Blood, vomiting  
I, still  
Lacking eyes, nose or mouth  
Neither amoeba nor fish  
Become a man of the future ...*

*In a desert in the moonlight  
Two cacti, their bodies full of thorns  
Tremble in the wind, talking of  
An untouchable love  
Or two sea turtles  
Swimming out to sea very slowly  
Eating the dark silence  
Together*

*They are my father and mother ...*

*Like dirty water running from a sewer  
Forever unnamed  
Having committed no crime  
Not knowing even the sweetness of light  
and air  
I will go*

*Suddenly to the other side river  
To a forest of old souls  
I this being will go*



Kazuko Shiraishi

The traditional five-line *tanka* and related *haiku* forms of *A Long Rainy Season* provide brilliant counterpoint to the modernity of Shiraishi and her colleagues. The fifteen poets represented in this first volume of Lowitz’s bookend set demonstrate their impressive grasp of form, movement, transition and resolution within the traditional architecture of the disciplines. These translations come off sounding purposeful, gracious and spirited, witnessed by such suggestively-crafted gems as the eighty year old Sonoko Nakamura’s:

*Land-locked bride  
tempted offshore—  
the open sea.*

*Under the sea  
there might be a city,  
I wash a peach.*

Ei Akitsu, one of the strongest poets and a gutsy discovery in the collection remarks:

*Sharp sickle  
of heaven—  
off with my head!  
Since I’m living my life  
like a giant slug.*

And again:

*I leave my house  
preoccupied with thoughts;  
a dog with saggy balls  
passes  
on the street.*

These are poems drawn from the everyday quotidian of living in the world. The opportunity Lowitz affords us of exploring the interior mind of contemporary Japanese women is in itself remarkable. The *tanka* form, and the *haiku* in particular, owe much of course to Zen Buddhism’s love of simplicity and spartan astringency; understandably they can seem ambiguous to Western eyes on first viewing. These women poets, however, handle the forms with renewing suppleness and energy; with a conviction that needs no magic decoder ring.

Amari Hayashi, a thirty-one year old Christian convert from Tokyo for example, in but two terse sentences compresses her theme into lines no classical Zen bard has bettered:

*“That girl?” She left  
here yesterday,” one says.  
“No, she hasn’t  
come yet,” says another.*

(continued on page 33)



# BLOOD, FEATHERS & HOLY MEN

Sheila Martindale

This is a wide-ranging novel, both geographically, spiritually, and historically. It takes place early in the tenth century, with a group of Celtic monks fleeing from the wreckage of a Viking raid, and heading to their home monastery in Derry, in a woefully inadequate vessel. They never make it there, being the victims of storms at sea, and of Norse pirates. The survivors become slaves, and their sufferings are a prelude to further violence as the adventure moves along. They find themselves on the east coast of North America, and are perhaps pre-cursors of the later invasions beginning with Columbus. History will repeat itself a few centuries later in the relationships between newcomers and native peoples. We see the good and the bad on both sides of the cultural divide, as well as learning about the characteristics of the Vikings.

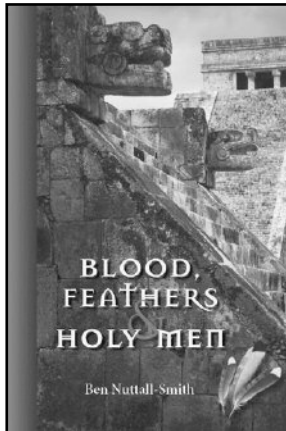
As the book progresses we migrate with our protagonists across the vastness of river, prairie and mountain, with the attendant changes in climate, until we reach what is now known as the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico. Here we discover the ancient civilizations of the area, the people's superstitions and customs, including the rituals of human sacrifice in all their graphic detail.

But this is much more than an imagined historical account; it is a spiritual as well as a physical journey. Our heroes struggle with the dichotomy of their ingrained Christian beliefs juxtaposed with the harmonious relationship of the native tribes with the earth and its resources. So the reluctant missionaries must adjust their attitudes if they are to survive in an unfamiliar and at times hostile environment. They learn new languages and new ways of living. Some of them become integrated to a degree, but the process is a painful one for all concerned.

Nuttall-Smith's characters are well-defined, evoking our empathy or disgust, with the lines between the two sometimes blurred. His descriptions of the land in its primitive and pristine state are quite remarkable, and his historical research appears authentic, with the resulting images being very real. If he takes sides at all, he comes down clearly in the aboriginal camp, demonstrating in many scenarios the superiority of their thinking, beliefs and behaviour. Of course, he deals with more than one indigenous group, each of them shaped by topography and climate. The facts and details presented are quite mind-boggling at times. Then there are the many difference between the Norsemen and the Celts, in both religion and culture, which are also dealt with sensitively and profoundly.

This book is definitely for those who like their excitement raw and in large quantities, but there is also a sprinkling of poetry and reflective prose. If I have a quarrel at all with it, it might be in the presentation. While the cover is quite attractive, someone should have pointed out to the designer that red on black does not show up very well. The pages seem a little crowded, with narrow margins and small typeface, which make each one look like an impenetrable wall of print – not very inviting for elderly eyes or for younger readers unused to enormous chunks of prose at a time. However, don't be put off by these quibbles, this is a rattling good yarn!

Sheila Martindale



*Blood, Feathers & Holy Men*  
Ben Nuttall-Smith  
Libros Libertad  
2010, 250 pages, \$23.00



Ben Nuttall-Smith

SPRING WINDS (continued from page 32)

As statements of women's experience these poems often ring timelessly, hauntingly. Often, they reveal a sighing fondness for the fall-away line. In the title-offering haiku by Nobuko Katsura, an Osaka poet born in 1914, we read of an existential ache universal in its compass:

*Someone else's wife—  
green garden peas steamed gently  
in hot water.*

*The nuisance  
of breasts—  
a long rainy season.*

For an awfully long time, what we've had available in English from Japan's women poets has been chiefly the translations of Rexroth and his disciples. With these two books, however, Lowitz expands the canon enormously. That they are presented in handsome, affordably priced editions from Stone Bridge, a press dedicated to translations from the Japanese, makes their happy arrival all the better. Producing volumes such as these cannot have been a light task and we are indebted to such cross-cultural work in service of the muse. Perhaps sufficient thanks is best offered in the words again of Amari Hayashi:

*Hunting for the place  
where body odor is strongest—  
"Go for the woman  
who smells the most!"*

*Trevor Carolan is the International Editor of PRRB. His latest work, The Lotus Singers: Contemporary Stories from South Asia, is published by Cheng & Tsui.*

IT IS I (continued from page 23)

through her descriptive palettes, singing in her chains like the sea, and Coldwell is a *muy simpatico* amanuensis.

When the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria mounted a Pat Martin Bates retrospective show a few years ago, her perforated light boxes were hung in a primal space that signified the beginning of life. Cave or womb, it didn't matter, the installation embodied what Cohen meant in his "Anthem." Light is life, but even more so for an artist whose childhood fell into a coal hole with only one way to go. Martin Bates' struggle is inspirational. She looks up, always up, and has made her life rhyme like the verses in hymns she learned as a child. The answers are in the stars she represents as pricks of light, something worth reaching for.

*Linda Rogers is a regular contributor to the PRRB. Her recent book Muscle Memory was voted Monday Magazine's poetry book of the year.*

BERRY (continued from page 5)

and buried in an old sleeping bag. There is evidence here also, I think, of a man at peace with the world, even at the time of death; or to use Berry's word, at *rest* with the world: he wants his body "to help fertilize the growth of a cactus or cliff rose or sagebrush or tree." Berry obliges Abbey's wishes when he writes a poem that houses his memory of Abbey metaphorically in a transforming vision of nature, in this case a grove of trees.

I don't know why I continued to think of Abbey as I read these poems today. Perhaps it's a kindred spirit between the qualities I find in his prose and in Berry's poetry. I am glad, however, that I didn't dismiss my daydreaming. I'm glad I went on to consider Abbey and his relationship with Berry. This journey clarified for me just what kind of amplitude abides inside this collection of poetry: "It stands for many lives." And turning once more to watch the leaves falling from the trees—here in my place, Miyazaki Japan—I feel strangely comforted by the idea of the "unreturning" of Berry's and the flowing creek below that carries the red maple leaves away.

*A doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri, Gregory Dunne is a regular contributor to PRRB. He writes from Japan.*

# IN CONTEMPT AND ANGER

R.T. James

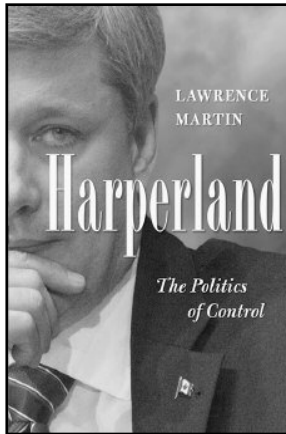
“In the contempt and anger of his lip.” Shakespeare’s phrase hardly does justice to the actions of Stephen Harper during his first five years as Prime Minister of Canada. During that time our nation has changed from a country where cooperation and concern for others has shifted toward confrontation and selfishness. In his *Globe and Mail* Op Ed columns over the years, Lawrence Martin leaves the Prime Minister’s capacity for contempt and anger to be revealed by Harper’s colleagues. Martin has covered the obsessive control that Harper has exercised in weakening or cancelling longstanding policies and programs that built Canada, and once sustained it. *Harperland* is not a collection of Martin’s columns, but a sustained narrative of Harper’s career, and in particular his actions as Prime Minister. In an attempt to reach a wide range of readers, Martin has provided an accurate picture of Harper, and of the type of rule he has brought to Canada.

Martin has also written cautiously about Harper’s dark and vindictive side. It’s the side of his personality that has driven him to cripple or shut down decades of responsible programs and governance by previous Conservative, Liberal, and coalition governments. So many changes that even an incomplete list of what has happened during Harper’s career would be far too long for this review. Martin’s own *partial* list appears as a lengthy footnote (pp. 287-88) in point form to his final chapter, “A Question of Character.” Along with many other Canadians, I have been following the hand of misanthropy and contempt that presses more heavily on our once hopeful land. Or as Harper regards us, “A second rate socialist country.” How has he been going about changing Canada into the country of his dreams?

It seems that he is committed in the angry, divisive, and at times, hateful tactics of the right wing of the Republican Party in the United States. Martin tactfully summarizes the new Conservative *modus operandi*, as “shrewd but dubious Tory tactics, the type of thing practised by their Republican brethren.” Examples of these questionable Republican-Tory tactics are legion. They begin with Harper’s approach to those around him. During a discussion about some advertising content with a trusted assistant at the National Citizens Coalition, he told the assistant, “I don’t give a fuck what you think.” Harper’s “visceral animosity” also extends to “a visceral hatred of the Liberal Party and its members.” These emotions have led him to say things that other politicians might qualify or withdraw. But not Harper. With no reply or defense from Harper, Ed Broadbent has called him a liar several times in print.

Concern for the environment always ranks as one of the greatest concerns for Canadians. In the face of overwhelming evidence of climate change, how is Harper approaching this grave threat? He has called the Kyoto Protocol on climate change “a socialist scheme.” He refused to let a respected federal government scientist speak publicly about global warming. He also shut down the government website devoted to providing information about climate change to Canadians. These approaches contradict the irrefutable evidence of world-wide changes. Which groups or organizations would be supporting Harper’s wrongheaded positions of denial on the environment?

So much for climate change. What about governing our country? Following the first election of his government, Harper provided all Conservative members of the House of Commons with a secret 200 page manual that detailed obstructive procedures to ensure that parliament and its committees failed to function. The threats he unleashed toward Tory members if they revealed the content of this manual are unknown. What is known is that these cowed representatives have kept his manual



*Harperland: The Politics of Control*  
Lawrence Martin  
Viking, 2010. \$35



Lawrence Martin

secret. Martin has been following this story in the *Globe*, and continues to wonder what this document contains.

Denial on climate change. Threats to members of his own party. How has he been treating those good Canadians who are trying to sustain and improve life in Canada? He fired the head of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission. He tried to muzzle the Auditor General and the Privy Council. Although the Mounties are supposed to enforce our laws, Harper’s office once tried, and failed to monitor RCMP activities. This contempt for justice didn’t stop with the RCMP. Harper pressured the Supreme Court to make a decision he wanted. He appointed a friend who made racist remarks as chair of the Anti-Patronage Commission. Then, in the resulting furor, he shut down the Anti-Patronage Commission. In one of his most egregious acts, Harper attacked the respected diplomat who revealed the involvement of Canadian Forces in the torture of Afghan detainees. Then he tried to scuttle the inquiry into the torture that implicated Canadians.

American Republicans like to go on about fiscal responsibility. Although lately they have practised staggering fiscal irresponsibility. How are our fiscal Conservatives doing? The Harper Conservatives took the \$2.8 billion surplus left by the Liberal government, and changed it into a \$500 million deficit in the space of one year. On one occasion, when the Parliamentary Budget Office contradicted Harper’s inaccurate or false figures, he cut the budget of this office in half. He also spent \$610,000 of our tax dollars on 546 Opinion Polls in one year. Probably trying to make sure he was still in touch with the voting base for whom he seems to do no wrong. Maybe these are the voters who had no concerns when Harper printed Conservative Party logos on federal infrastructure cheques issued to communities across Canada.

Harper has also approved the purchase of 65 F-35 fighter jets to replace Canada’s aging CF-18 jets. The ballooning cost of these new jets is one problem. The other, far more serious, is that these aircraft are not designed primarily for defense, but as first strike attack jets. In the words of the Rideau Institute’s Steven Staples, they are designed “to bomb cities and military bases on the first night of war.” Instead, shouldn’t Canada be replacing its aging transport planes that ferry humanitarian food and medical supplies to countries struck by disaster? Or is “humanitarian” not in the vocabulary of the officially renamed Harper Government of Canada?

We have also been witness to Bev Oda’s contemptuous obfuscation. Or is it barefaced lying to parliament, and to the people of Canada? Integrity Commissioner Christiane Ouint’s office reviewed 228 complaints of alleged wrongdoing, but did not act on or uphold any of the complaints. And for the first time in almost a century and a half of Canadian history, the governing party has been found in contempt of parliament by a House of Commons committee.

*Harperland* is a thorough accounting of Harper’s actions. However, Martin’s columns did not include a few changes that occurred before his book was printed. Without warning, Harper cut funding to Status of Women Canada programs by 40%. He also shut down the federal Farm Women’s Bureau by fiat. Since Martin’s book was published late in 2010, Harper’s drastic changes to Canada’s way of life have continued unabated. What can we expect from the far right, evangelical-backed bully pulpit of Harper’s majority, elected May 2, 2011? More contempt toward parliament, and toward most Canadians.

An area of deep concern that has not been adequately covered so far in the media is the fate of federal staff and departments. In the years of Harper’s minority government, experienced and committed civil servants have been turfed, or sidelined and are now often supervised by inexperienced and incompetent Harper ideologues. Years of fair and balanced research, good and thoughtful guidelines, and voluminous historical documents have disappeared in Harper’s rush to overturn nearly a century and a half of nation building. Once the documentary records of who we are as a nation are gone, the vacuum is easily filled with vile propaganda. What can we expect? With contempt and anger, more of our past, more of social programs, and more of our future will be shredded.

*R. T. James shares the deep concerns of many Canadians about Stephen Harper.*

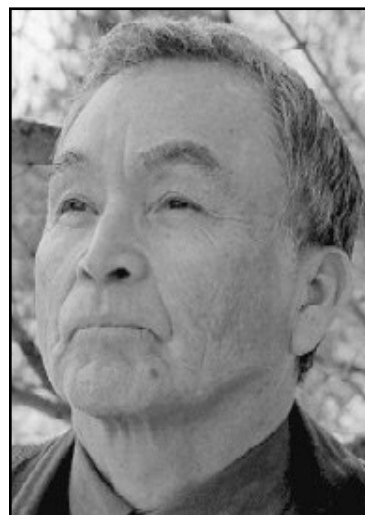
# THE OOSUMICH OF OPEN FORM: WRITING AS VISION QUEST

Paul Nelson

Poetry can be a mode of deepening one's consciousness – this I know from personal experience and from stories of how others lives were turned around by a self-guided exploration of the tradition and practice of poetry. The case of Jimmy Santiago Baca, who taught himself to read and write in prison and used his imagination to help overcome being abandoned by his mother and the abuse of an alcoholic father, is one of the more remarkable cases. At one point in prison when he was about to commit murder, a voice in his head with the words of poets was reinforcing – or even becoming his conscience at one point – giving him the strength to choose a different option. This is one particularly vivid example of the power of poetry to aid in the process of aiding the development of consciousness. Noted poet and translator Sam Hamill, who had a similar experience with poetry, refers to the *wisdom tradition* the ancient Chinese and Japanese, especially, have taught him.

Yet the word “consciousness” is a difficult word to use without some perspective. Robert Ornstein in his seminal book *The Psychology of Consciousness* points out that textbook definitions are problematic, that consciousness is experiential. He does provide an interesting chart he calls “The Two Modes of Consciousness: A Tentative Dichotomy.” One mode can be described as intellectual and active, while the second is sensuous and receptive. The first is, in his words, “lineal” and the second “nonlinear and intuitive.” (Ornstein 67).

More recently, John Upledger, whose studies of consciousness have been in the experiential mode with the healing modality he pioneered known as *Craniosacral Therapy*, writes: “I don't think we'll ever be able to fit an understanding of consciousness into a provable model that would be considered scientifically acceptable – a



Dr E. Richard Atleo, Umeek

model that could fit into our concept of an investigation that obeys the rules of experimental design, and that is able to be duplicated by others” (Upledger 36).

Interestingly, the American public seems to be more open to more holistic approaches when confronted with chronic medical conditions such as back problems, anxiety, depression, and headaches. According to a study cited in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, between 1990 and 1997 there was a 47.3% increase in total visits to alternative medicine practitioners, from 427 million in 1990 to 629 million in 1997, thereby exceeding total visits to all U.S. primary care physicians. These folks were paying out-of-pocket, which makes the results all the more telling (Eisenberg et al. 1).

We see the stirrings of holism in the mechanistic American public through this and countless other examples, yet models for a holistic paradigm are ancient. Of those indigenous to North America, the worldview of the Nuu-chah-nulth people of British Columbia has been expertly laid out by Umeek, also known as Dr. E. Richard Atleo, a hereditary Chief of the Ahousat people. An indigenous scientific research modality in the Nuu-chah-nulth tradition is known as Oosumich. This modality is similar to what many cultures refer to as the Vision Quest. In an interview conducted by the author, Umeek discussed his Grandfather Keesta, who was known as the last of the original whalers and his process of preparation for the whale hunt:

*Keesta himself as a whaler would practice what we've called Oosumich... that is a method to acquire knowledge. A method to access knowledge from the spiritual realm. And so for that purpose he would isolate himself for long periods of time and fast, and pray, and deny himself the physical pleasure of the world in order to focus on the spiritual concerns that he had, assuming that the spiritual dimension had power, had knowledge, had treasures that he could access through a correct methodology. Now the fundamental requirement in successful scientific experimentation, the classical form was neutrality. Scientists attempted to be neutral in their observations so as not to bias the*

*information that (was gathered in the experiment. Objectivity.) ...Now this has been challenged by feminist theory, and rightly so. However, there's a lot of credence to the classical form of research (which) created this form of technology... It has served classical science and scientific methodology very legitimately. Oosumich is also a methodology. When it's practiced, the critical stance, according to our origin stories, is ...humility. Objectivity is the proper stance in science. If we merge the two together, and make a more complete knowledge acquisition system, scientists will have to buy in to the humility aspect, because without humility, there is no seeing in the spiritual realm... The word Oosumich has in it the root Oo which means “be careful” and so it's based on the view of reality that perceives it as along a spectrum which might be divided in two. On the one side, we might call it the dark, evil, destructive aspect of reality and the other side, the beautiful, the creative, the glorious, the harmonious, the balance. All of those things that can describe Qua-ootz – Owner of Reality... We create ceremonies and we create teachings to manage this reality as we perceive it through Oosumich. We cannot perceive this reality with our physical eyes, but more with our spiritual eyes through Oosumich. Physical eyes will corroborate what we see through the spiritual realm, but the spiritual realm will give you a greater kind of certainty about the nature of reality... (Atleo)*

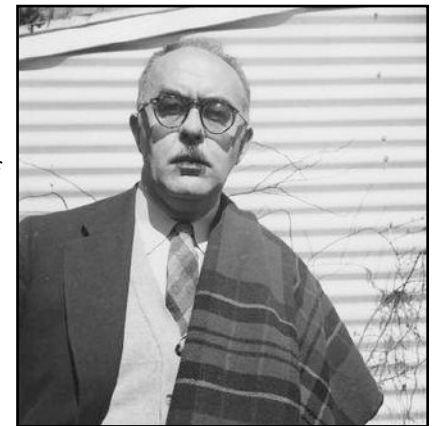
I am reminded of several things here, first of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle<sup>1</sup>, which suggests that total objectivity in an experiment is not always possible. The researcher can have an effect on the outcome. Second, the application of an Open Form writing practice to the deepening of one's consciousness. In one of the most comprehensive outlines of this writing stance, Charles Olson writes of the need to get “rid of the lyrical interference of the ego and also to achieving an humilitas sufficient to make him (the poet) of use” (Olson 247).

Like the vision quest described by Atleo, the poet working in Open Form is on a vision quest in the realm of the consciousness of a particular moment in time. This work may be rewarded through publications, occasional paid readings or workshops, but the poet who earns a living simply from poetry is rare, and is not usually of the caliber that stands the test of time. So the rewards of writing tend to be of the spiritual nature. Yet, like the Oosumich practitioner, one cannot use the linear, the rational/intellectual consciousness to access those deeper realms of existence. It is why Olson suggested a process which “engages speech where it is least careless – and least logical” (241). Perhaps it can be seen as a modality that could fill the vacuum created by the absence of ceremony in Western culture. Again, while the Oosumich practitioner uses the spiritual eyes the Open Form practitioner uses the spiritual EARS in a use of language that has more in common with music than with linear thought. And it is partly developing the trust in a process with its nonlinear gaps that allows the deepening of consciousness available to the Open Form practitioner. To trust the odd phrase because *it sounds good* and to have verification of the deeper meaning years later is an experience all writers should have. The experience of Eileen Myles in the composition of the poem *Milk*, written before the 9/11 terror attacks in the town she has called home for many years, is telling:

*Milk*

*I flew into New York  
and the season  
changed*

(continued on page 36)



Charles Olson with serape, photograph by Jonathan Williams, part of collection at [charlesolson.uconn.edu](http://charlesolson.uconn.edu)

# IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH?

*Eric Spalding*

**H** *Heaven Is Small* by Emily Schultz intrigued me because I'm interested in book publishing and this novel takes place in a publishing house. In fact, apart from flashbacks, almost everything that happens in the novel occurs within the company. Still, I did not learn much about publishing, as the business side of things is chiefly a backdrop to the main action. But after all the novel has no pretence of being a manual on book publishing.

The clever first line presents the main character as deceased: "Moments after his death, an event he had failed to notice, Gordon Small sought new employment" (p. 3). There ensue about sixty pages of exposition before we start to understand what is going on – why a dead person ends up working at a publishing house. In these opening pages, we learn how Small got his job, we meet his office mates and we learn about his life before death. Small's failed relationship with Chloe Gold, the love of his life and death, is richly described, reminding us of the toll that a love lost can take on a person.

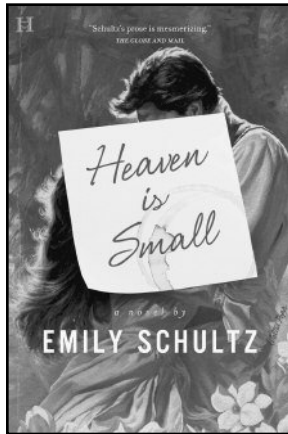
Small, however, especially at the start, is a self-effacing character. I did not find him particularly compelling to read about. As for his colleagues at the publishing house, there are several of them and, in my opinion, their personalities aren't clearly distinguished. Also, initially, what Small does at work is mundane, and there's no sense of a conflict – we just follow routine goings-on at the office. However, a modicum of suspense starts to build in the last third of the book, when Small's boss emerges as a foil for him. Nevertheless, the stakes in the novel seemed low to me. Small doesn't appear to care much about his job nor about getting fired from it. As a consequence, I didn't care much either.

Still, my curiosity was piqued by the mystery raised in the opening sentence. Why *was* a deceased person working as a proofreader? In the first quarter of the book, I found myself getting impatient to find out what was going on. I wondered why Small took so long to discover that he was dead, given his unusual state: "He did not eat, drink, or sleep any more. He did not bleed. He did not excrete in a normal manner. He did not sweat or salivate. He did not breathe. He did not process pain." (p. 143)

Moreover, Emily Schultz emphasizes that other ghosts working in the office are not self-aware enough to realize that they too have passed away. I didn't accept the idea that these ghosts needed Small to inform them that they were dead, and that in doing so he posed a threat to normal business operations.

Eventually, Schultz reveals and describes the strange world that Small works in. As a reader, I had reservations about the premise. Why would ghosts care about publishing romance novels for the living? Aren't there enough such books already published by the living? And how can such a huge company operate in the world without the living starting to wonder about the absence of its staff members in their day-to-day lives? Indeed, how can any company function without regular interactions with the living?

All the same, the book does raise meaningful questions about the afterlife. What indeed if heaven is not as wonderful as it is supposed to be? Is eternal bliss a kind of drugged state where you don't care about anything or is your happiness tempered by conflicts with others or regrets about things left undone on earth? Under such circumstances, might some people prefer oblivion to eternal life? Also, if you achieve meaning in your life on earth through work, wouldn't you want to have a job in heaven as well? If so, would you seek out employment in an office? I don't know how a theologian would answer these questions. All I know is that Schultz is effective at



*Heaven Is Small*  
Emily Schultz  
(Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2009),  
250 pages



*Emily Schultz reads from Heaven is Small at the launch in Toronto*

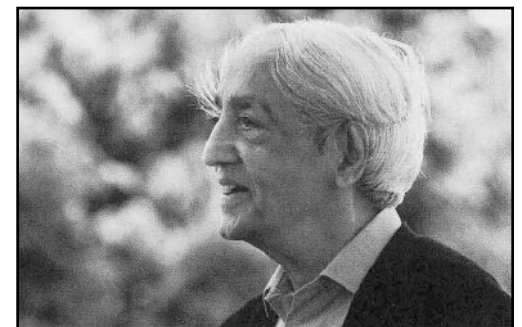
making us think about them.

*Heaven Is Small* did not captivate me. However, the novel has a unique premise that raises thought-provoking ideas about love and life after death. It is also meticulously written in a clear style. Schultz has a vivid imagination, and in my opinion is in the early stages of a bright career as a novelist and poet.

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

OOSUMICH (continued from page 35)

*a giant burr  
something hot was moving  
through the City  
that I knew  
so well. On the  
plane though it was  
white and stormy  
faceless  
I saw the sun  
& remembered the warning  
in the kitchen of all places  
in which I was  
informed my wax  
would melt... (103)*



*Jiddu Krishnamurti*

These kinds of things (coincidences, synchronicities?) come from a stance deeper than Ornstein's Phase One of consciousness. The Open Form practitioner, at best, is like that Oosumich practitioner, seeking to tap into knowledge that is mysterious and greater than him or herself. It is not subject to the rules of linear time. It is perhaps only in fleeting moments between medical appointments as in the case of William Carlos Williams, achieving a different kind of mind of which Krishnamurti knows: "A mind that listens with complete attention will never look for a result, because it is constantly unfolding; like a river, it is always in movement. Such a mind is totally unconscious of its own activity, in the sense that there is no perpetuation of a self, of a "me" that is seeking to achieve an end." (Krishnamurti 2)

The proof that an Open Form practitioner uses this method to deepen his or her own consciousness may not be duplicatable in a traditional scientific methodological way, but to Krishnamurti "...there is no arriving, there is only the movement of learning – and that is the beauty of life." (Krishnamurti 2)

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# NEW WORLD FRONTIER: ON CASCADIAN LITERATURE

Paul Nelson

It does not take long to get into the huge presence that serves as the foundation, substrate, or main influence of the collection *Making Waves: Reading BC and Pacific Northwest Literature*. It's Gary Snyder. It takes the editor just two sentences into the introduction to tip his hand. Trevor Carolan admits West Coast literary history is young and still evolving in the first sentence, then wisely invokes Snyder and Snyder's "new world" culture in the second. For it is Snyder, more than anyone else, who has pointed the way for the region's literary aesthetic and Carolan knew that decades ago and, as such, serves as a very credible guide.

If Cascadia, the region between Cape Mendocino and the Alaska panhandle has a poet laureate, it's likely Snyder. He has been at the vanguard of what makes the best poetry of this region at once both fascinating and also a way out of the industry-generated-culture which would consume the planet if given the chance. Carolan's intelligent and eminently readable essay near the end of the collection sums up the best of Snyder's contribution and, through that gesture, shows us where the intelligent, novel and conscious minds in this region's literature have led us and what work is left to do in their wake. Elements of Snyder's ethos include:

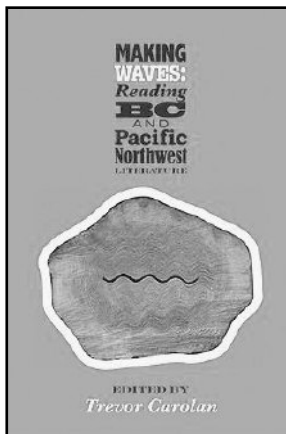
- An emphasis on Asian literary and spiritual traditions
- Resonance with indigenous values
- Bioregionalism
- Poetics of wilderness (the wild mind over the garden-variety)
- A poetry of place
- Interconnectedness and an ethos of how everything in a system has value.

One can go on about how right on Snyder is, but Carolan already has, and if his counterparts at a recent international literary conference are any indication, the rest of the literary world is validating that as well.<sup>1</sup> One Snyder quote Carolan cites is from the essay "A Village Council of All Beings." In it Snyder likens an ecosystem to a mandala and says,

*Each figure in the mandala – a little mouse or bird (or little god or demon figure) – has an important position and a role to play. Although ecosystems can be described as hierarchical in terms of energy flow, from the standpoint of the whole, all of its members are equal (236).*

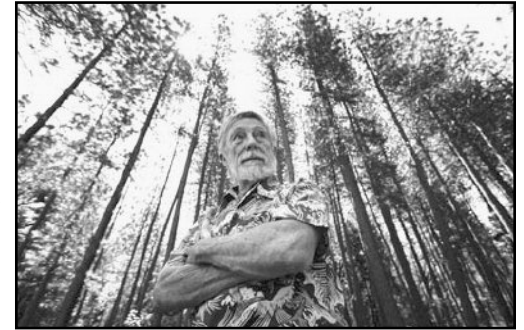
When it comes to the "wild mind" concept, Snyder suggests rather than the mental illness associated with wild in mainstream culture, he suggests it is "elegantly self-disciplined, self-regulating and self-maintained" (237). This could well-describe the open form poetics Snyder and his fellow Beat poets have utilized for over fifty years now. Carolan's familiarity with Snyder shows and allows him to find and then cite less-known scholars on a similar track, such as the Australian journalist Tim Costello. Like Snyder, Costello suggests the ethos to lead us out of the rampant materialism requires an understanding of interconnectedness. And also that the new meta-narrative of our time might put meditation, recycling, using public transportation, and greening one's neighborhood alongside the Christian traditions of prayer, bible study and the "love thy neighbor" teaching. (This sure sounds like the values of my neighborhood.) We forgive Carolan when he suggests T.S. Eliot as the 20<sup>th</sup> century's chief arbiter of poetry and literary aesthetics in English when it's clear Olson and Williams are more likely choices.

But Snyder's foci are expanded by other contributors to this very strong and eminently readable collection, most notably Paul Falardeau's essay on Robert Bringhurst and the remarkable investigation of Haida oral literature—the latter also reinforces much of Snyder's program of indigenous values, including the importance of place and value of the intelligence of the natural world. The fact that British Columbia accounts for nearly 60 percent of Canada's First Nations languages says a great deal about what is still valuable about the indigenous perspective, and about what was lost



*Making Waves: Reading British Columbia and Pacific Northwest Literature*  
Trevor Carolan, ed.  
Anvil Press, 272 p. 2010

further east on Turtle Island. Most remnants of these cultures were destroyed or weakened almost to extinction. How that culture is tied to literature has been Bringhurst's life work, and Falardeau opens a door to the profound wisdom still held by this ancient surviving culture about genuinely understanding and living in harmony with the region referred to as British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest.

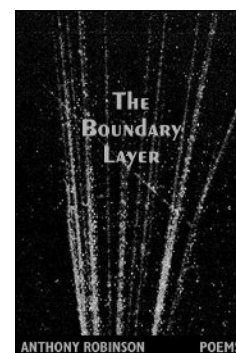


"New World" influence Gary Snyder

Elsewhere, Hilary Turner gives us a look at the internal politics at the University of British Columbia that helped set the stage for the TISH movement. Judith Copithorne takes us from that point through the TISH days and into the present with a personal and informal checklist of events, people and publications. Ron Dart goes into the details of how the New American Poetry was picked up and made uniquely Canadian in Vancouver and British Columbia, but not without a fight by the old guard nationalists. His essay on West Coast Literary-Political Clashes ends with a suggestion that the battle continues: nationalist values remain strong within an important constituency of B.C. and Canadian writers, even as we have pointed out above, a new bioregional ethos that transcends nations is phasing its way in.

Though this is a volume of essays about BC and Pacific Northwest literature, there are no essays penned by anyone south of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. And though there are no essays written by U.S. Americans, the influence of U.S. schools of poetry on West Coast literature is unmistakable. Beat and Black Mountain schools are pointed out various times. Most notably, Colin James Sanders' essay on the influence of The Berkeley Renaissance and especially the work of Robin Blaser, the Idaho native who had the sense to flee the U.S. for Canada long before The Reagan/Bush/Clinton/Bush years. Blaser's star will only grow brighter as time goes by and culture catches up to his

(continued on page 38)



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~ Richard Wirick, author of *100 Siberian Postcards* and *Kicking In*

Anthony Robinson was educated in Philosophy and English at Berkeley and he began his career as a designer and builder in the desert in Arizona. He is co-editor and publisher of *Transformation: A Journal of Literature, Ideas & the Arts*, and he teaches Environmental Sustainability at Southern Methodist University.

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# ENTER THE CHRYSANTHEMUM

Frances Cabahug

The chrysanthemum is at once an object of beauty, a subject of art, and a symbol of grief as well as remembrance. Just like the versatile flower, each poem in Fiona Tinwei Lam's *Enter the Chrysanthemum* transcends the immediacy of its imagery and delivers singular moments into the realm of the profound and universal. In these poems, Lam plucks out everyday interactions that, while seemingly innocent and familiar, cover the tenuous connections that lie at the heart of human relationships.

The ties that prove to be the most convoluted and frail when laid bare also happen to be the most basic: family bonds. The complexity of family ties, particularly between children and parents, becomes apparent in the first section of this collection. The poems accomplish a delicate balance in displaying parental figures that are brilliant and accomplished but imposing and clinical as well. In "Waiting", a child waits in the car as her father conducts his doctor's rounds, and the act of waiting becomes a wearisome sign of devotion that needs to be proven again and again. In a similar vein, the opening poem "Chrysanthemum" dwells on a young girl's scrutiny of her mother's dedication in painting chrysanthemums. The poem's attention to the painterly details proves the girl's rapt admiration for her mother's talent, but its vivid descriptions then turn inward to reveal a ghostly, unspoken longing:

*If only I had been paper,  
a delicate, upturned face stroked  
with such precise tenderness.*

The strong, concrete imagery contrasts with the tentatively revealed feelings of a child's vulnerability. And what is more distressing than the sadness of a child seeking to be consoled? But *Enter the Chrysanthemum* isn't a work of condemnation. Instead, understanding arrives through the collection's portrayal of the cyclical nature of life. The poems move decades into the future and the parents no longer stand so strong and imposing. The once-mighty matriarch shrinks into the frail woman who has lost her husband and her memory, and she is now the one looking for reprieve. "Call" shows an example of this role reversal:

*These days, every hour or less,  
a phone call from my mother.*

*She flails and clutches at me through the line.  
Help me. But I can't drag her out.*

Lam makes it clear that familial interactions are not as straightforward as the passage of time brings about shifting roles. The scenes with the aging parents are frustrating for the daughter who must now assume the position of the caretaker – a position requiring necessary strength, even steeliness. Through this shift in the daughter's responsibilities, Lam reveals the high cost of being needed.

*Enter the Chrysanthemum* advances from exploring the complexities of being a daughter to the equally complex position of becoming a mother. The parents in the earlier poems are also forgiven, in a way, by the collection's confessions of the difficulties in raising a child. The poems in the motherhood section pummel the reader with insights spoken on the brink of exhaustion mixed with unceasing affection. Lam does not shy away from admitting how burdensome it is to become the giver to one who demands so much in "Ablution":

*After weeks' worth of wrestling him  
into his stroller, tantrums in shop aisles,  
strained lullabies, night terrors,  
chairs heaped with laundry,  
I at last put him down*



*Enter the  
Chrysanthemum*  
Fiona Tinwei Lam  
Caitlin Press, 2009  
86 pages

*for the nap we both need,  
my brain a slow smoulder.*

*Ten minutes later, he shifts  
in his sheets, kicking off blankets, rising  
while I sink.*

*Rain, scour my spirit.  
Cleanse this day of its little fists.*

As with "Ablution," the rest of the poems in *Enter the Chrysanthemum* dismantle the myth of mother hens in blissful parenthood. Instead, there is a heightened sensitivity to new-found anxieties through the lens of the protective parent. Every action is magnified as the mother recognizes the vulnerability of her son and connects it to the vulnerability of others in this world. And this is where Lam's collection combines the personal with the public, the domestic with the political. In the poem "Playground," the mother struggles to inform her son of the cruelty that can take place in a faraway continent just as it can take place around the corner:

*No distance between him and the screen,  
us and the world.*

*Since he was born, I can't turn on the news.  
I leave the paper face down.*

And yet *Enter the Chrysanthemum* is work of watchfulness, of honing a penetrating look at kindness and cruelties alike as a testament to living and loving. "You wait it out. All you can do – keep vigil...A vigil to wait out the worst we can be to each other." This emphasis on vigilance becomes an important metaphor for the way that these poems emphasize capturing the moment and becoming witnesses for the people in our lives. *Enter the Chrysanthemum* is ultimately a collection of ritualized awareness that can only come from a conscious and reflective engagement with everyday life.

*Frances Cabahug regularly reviews for PRRB in the past. She lives in Vancouver, BC.*

NEW WORLD (continued from page 37)

literary genius. Blaser's brilliance was reflected in his short-lived journal *Pacific Nation*, which said in 1967 what we are suggesting today, that the time has come for a nation of authors who, in Blaser's words,

*...take responsibility for a map which is addressed to travelers of the earth, the world and the spirit... Images of our cities and of our politics must join our poetry. I want a nation in which discourse is active and scholarship is understood, as it should be, the mode of our understanding and the ground of our derivations (39).*

As the planet goes through unprecedented climate chaos brought on by the rampant materialism, the Newtonian-Cartesian ethos of reductionism, and the abandonment of the sacred, it will be the ethos represented well in many essays of *Making Waves* that survives. In the editor's parlance, it is a "Dharma Citizenship" that must take root. Snyder was there in the 1950s and the best literature of this region takes this as a given. *Making Waves* is a primer into the quickly maturing regional literature that can lead a new global culture deeply into this Third Millennium.

*Paul Nelson writes from Columbia City, Washington.*

<sup>1</sup> At the *Tools of the Sacred Conference* in Brussels, May 2010, presentations focused on some aspect of Snyder's work were far and away the most popular single topic.



Fiona Tinwei Lam

# AMERICAN WAR MACHINE

R.T. James

**A**merican War Machine is unique among books that examine global relations that are usually under the radar. Some books focus on American foreign policy, or US military action in other countries. Others examine the global trade in opium and heroin. Others touch on the sometimes shaky foundations of global financial systems. Some dare to look at 'off the books' CIA operations in various countries. Some present proof of Air America planes transporting heroin. Peter Dale Scott's new book integrates these topics into a detailed account that connects these previously unconnected narratives and relationships.

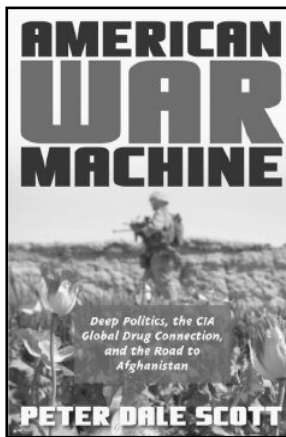
*American War Machine* exhibits more of the deep and precise research evident in Scott's recent work, *The Road to 9/11: Wealth, Empire, and the Future of America*. *American War Machine* examines the role and complicity of agents of the United States government who have supported and profited from the illicit drug trade in Afghanistan and other countries for more than half a century. United States government agents, and in particular CIA agents, have a long history of working with criminal elements and government officials in these countries to fund operations that are off the books with no official records in support of American Foreign Policy goals that are sometimes openly stated or covert, and at worst, deeply counterproductive.

The countries where the US has been deeply involved in the drug trade include, but are not limited to, Laos, Mexico, Thailand, Columbia, Vietnam and Afghanistan. For each country, Scott presents the longstanding relationships that connect drug traffickers, police and/or military officials, local government representatives, and United States CIA agents. His research is grounded in both scholarly publications and credible sources such as the World Bank, the *Economist*, the *New York Times*, the US Congressional Record, and the *Wall Street Journal* before it was mugged by Murdoch. Scott also refers to the work of trustworthy researchers such as Seymour Hersh, Naomi Klein, Steve Coll, and Lawrence Wright. Wright's *The Looming Tower* was a strong account of a number of the key trajectories that led to 9/11.

Scott cites the research of Alfred W. McCoy, whose ground breaking book, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* (1972) has been recently republished in an updated edition. McCoy has testified before United States Congress concerning CIA and US government involvement in the drug trade. McCoy accompanied Scott on the day he went to the house of a US Special Forces veteran of the Vietnam War. The veteran had agreed to be interviewed in order to describe seeing "opium loaded onto the CIA's Air America airplanes in Asia." Their visit to the veteran's house, and the sudden, very alarming truncation of the meeting, provide the disturbing opening paragraphs of *American War Machine*.

American government planes delivering drugs? The Hollywood crime drama, *American Gangster*, touched briefly on this possibility when the obsessive lone police detective saves the day by discovering heroin from southeast Asia inside the caskets of American soldiers killed in Vietnam. His discovery allows him to arrest one of the men responsible for arranging the shipments. The film was an entertaining oversimplification. As Scott makes clear in *American War Machine*, many people, many planes, and organizations in a number of countries are involved in the global drug trade underworld and overworld.

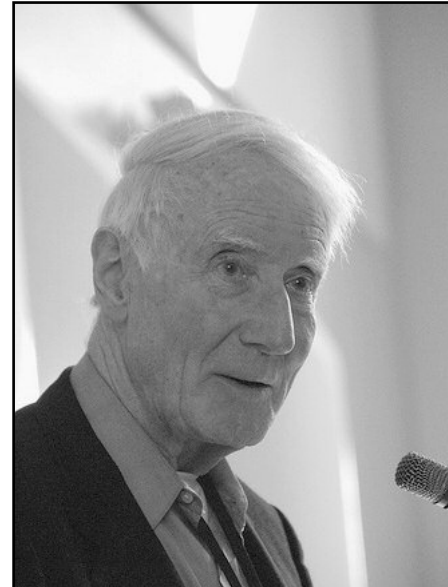
If you have a tendency to avoid the endnotes in a book, read them here. Scott's 106 pages of notes are necessary in order to understand the complex histories and deep relationships that sustain the toxic symbiosis of the global drug trade and the American war machine. Convincing evidence and support material for Scott's arguments appear throughout these notes. On page 62, for example, US Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin refers to "the largest, most comprehensive drug-money laundering case in the history of United States law enforcement." Notes 130 and 131 on page 281 provide this background: "When it became clear 70 United States, American, banks were involved, had the complicity, knew about every single one of the wire-transfers, and transactions—banks including Chemical Bank, Bank of New York, Citibank, American Express— . . . President Clinton and Madeline Albright stepped in and



*American War Machine: Deep Politics, the CIA Global Drug Connection, and the Road to Afghanistan*  
Peter Dale Scott  
Rowman & Littlefield,  
hardcover, \$39

intervened and stopped the entire investigation and closed all of the cases."

If the President of the United States of America and his formidable Secretary of State Madeline Albright shut down the largest investigation into the profiteering of American banks from drug money laundering, where might this investigation have led if it had been allowed to continue? Who was involved? What did Clinton and Albright have to fear? The conclusion of this investigation would have made the money laundering in John le Carré's novel, *Our Kind of Traitor*, read like non-fiction. A conclusion that may have endangered too many who were involved. *American War Machine* describes numerous situations where an investigation into US government and CIA involvement in global drug trade profits is shut down by senior government officials.



Peter Dale Scott

US financier David Stockman is not concerned about endangerment. This former advisor to President Ronald Reagan helped launch the 1980s recession that created the first great wave of homeless people since the Great Depression. In a typical neo conservative attack recently, Stockman claimed that under President Obama, "the Fed [United States Federal Reserve] is injecting high-grade heroin into the financial system." During Stockman's time in the Reagan administration, it created the Office of Public Diplomacy, staffed by "experts from CIA and Special forces, to plant . . . propaganda in the American press" (Scott, *The Road to 9/11*, p. 22). This new Office accelerated the loose relationship with the truth between the government and the supine, for the most part, news media. Stockman seems to have misunderstood his own collusion with whom ever has been injecting what where. *American War Machine* should clarify any confusion.

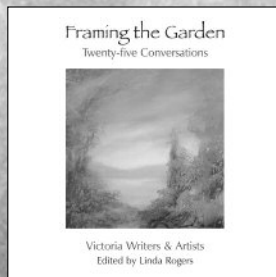
The global drug trade financial injections run deeper than funding CIA off the books operations. A United States Senate staff report estimated "that \$500 billion to \$1 trillion in criminal proceeds are laundered through banks worldwide each year, with about half of that amount moved through United States banks." (p. 228). Whether these numbers are too high or low is in dispute. However, Antonio Maria Costa, head of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, said he has seen evidence that the proceeds of organised crime were 'the only liquid investment capital' available to some banks on the brink of collapse last year [2008]. He said that a majority of the \$352bn (£216bn) of drugs profits was absorbed into the economic system as a result." (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/global/2009/dec/13/drug-money-banks-saved-un-chief-claims/print>)

Scott's book presents unusually deep research into the deep politics of government and CIA involvement in off the books profits from the global drug trade in opium and its derivative heroin. While he carefully provides evidence of the deep collusion and connections between the drug trade, corrupt governments, police and military officials in various countries, rogue CIA operations, and naïve neo-conservative ideologues, it is important to remember the terrible suffering, soaring drug addiction, recurring *casus belli*, and high death toll associated with the world wide drug trade. It is also important to note that many senior and committed US officials are not aware of these deep connections. Scott also notes the unfortunate fate of some of those who have tried to bring these connections to light. His book requires far more elucidation than is possible here.

*American War Machine* is a powerful book. Peter Dale Scott writes with the scholar and historian's attention to detail, accuracy, and unimpeachable conclusions. And with the poet's fearless commitment to pose the difficult questions whose answers may offer hope, and may even set us free. Scott also writes with the humanist's belief in the possibilities of the balm of truth.

R.T. James is a Canadian writer.

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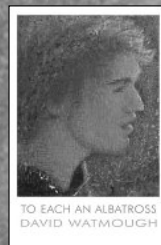
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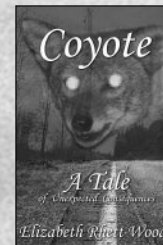
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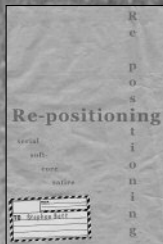
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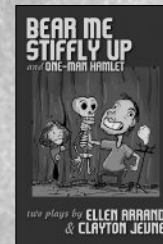
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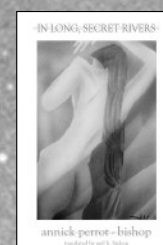
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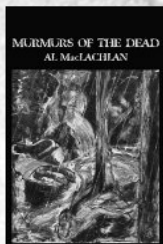
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