PRRB

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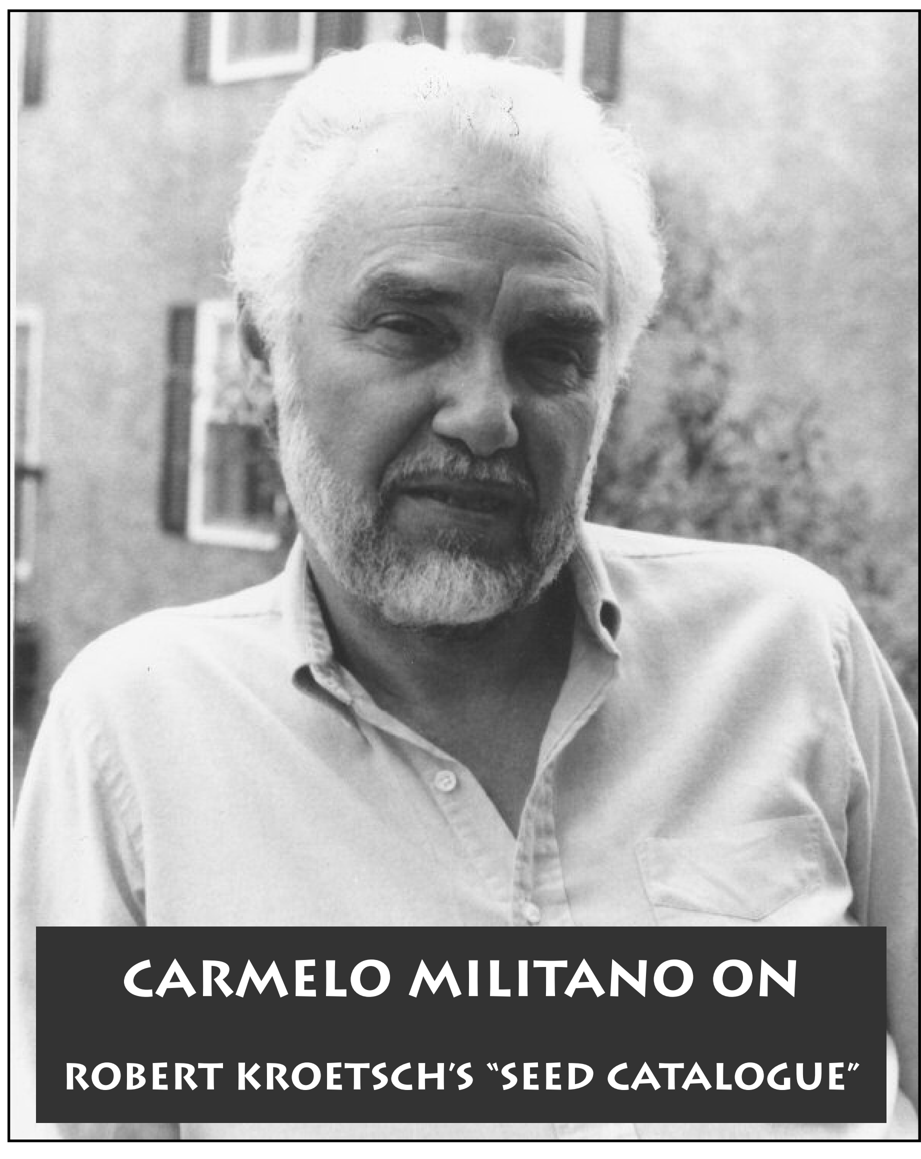
A SUMMER FLOWERING OF WRITERS & BOOKS



CARMELO MILITANO ON

ROBERT KROETSCH'S "SEED CATALOGUE"

RICHARD WIRICK ON

RICHARD FORD'S "CANADA"

READING ROBERT SUND
REVIEW BY MICHAEL DALEY

"THE GREAT ENIGMA"
THOMAS TRANSTROMER'S SELECTED
REVIEWED BY JAMES EDWARD REID

POEMS BY YANNIS RITSOS
REVIEWED BY AMY HENRY

A GREAT SOUL: IRVING LAYTON
BY DOUG BEARDSLEY

RAIN, ROADS AND ROO BORSON
REVIEWED BY YVONNE BLOMER

THE LIFE OF MRS. W.B.YEATS
REVIEWED BY ANDREW PARKIN

YOLANDE VILLEMAIRE
IN TRANSLATION
REVIEWED BY LINDA ROGERS

PLUS: TOM WAYMAN, MACHINATIONS OF THE CBC, YASUKO THANH, JIM MORRISON AND THE DOORS, RANDY WESTON, SHAWNA YANG RYAN, JOANNA LILLEY ON POETS IN THE YUKON & SAILING TO PATAGONIA.

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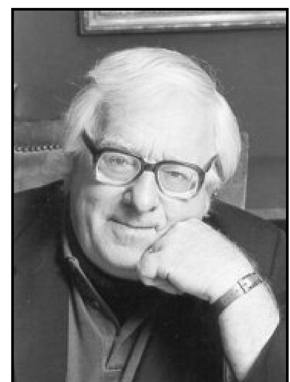
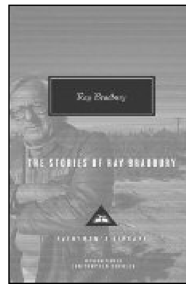
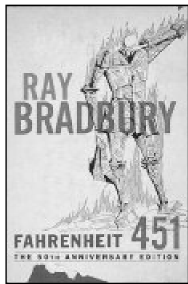


This issue of the *Pacific Rim Review of Books* is dedicated to the memory of Ray Bradbury (1920-2012). Novelist, playwright and visionary, he will be missed.



The Stories of Ray Bradbury
Everyman's Library



Fahrenheit 451: 50th Anniversary Edition
Ballantine Books

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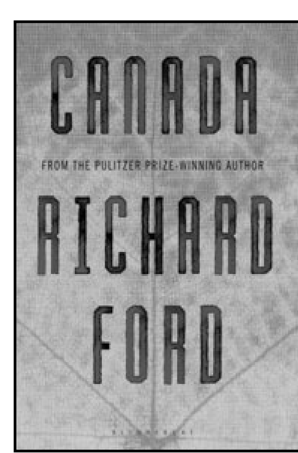
Racine on the Prairie: Richard Ford's Canada

Richard Wirick



Canada
Richard Ford
HarperCollins (Ecco)
446 Pages

Flying over the Great Plains to visit my sister in the Twin Cities, the far fields of both Dakotas stretch out in hundreds of miles of unruffled tableland, the gold and grey and russet of wheat fields stone-still from this altitude but undulating to their walkers and drivers in whatever breezes the passes allow. My perspective is a vista of breadth, a land unto itself that stands apart from what the ground observer sees: an ocean of crops unrivalled by any landscape save perhaps for the Asian steppes. You could say we inhabit different lands—-the walker and the flyer—-and that we could cross this border of altitude to see the diversity of the same terrain from the other's person's point of vision.

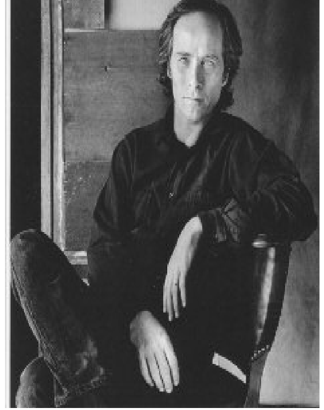
This is a land Richard Ford knows well (his third novel, *Wildlife*, was placed here), and serves as the setting of his newest novel, the first since his groundbreaking and highly acclaimed Bascombe trilogy. The year is 1960. America has a young, inspiring President, a robust economy, and the menace of Soviet missles far away but never out of mind. (Notably, many of their U.S. Army counterparts lay in silos beneath this unassuming ground.)

A family of four lives a relatively uneventful life in the Montana railroad and farming city of Great Falls. The father is one of those handsome Centurions whose life reached its apogee during his recent military service. He wears his still name-tagged but bar-stripped jumpsuit as a reminder of days he bird dogged girls, drank half-pints of Yellowstone bourbon, and—-descending from year to feckless year in his early thirties—didn't have rent to pay and two children to raise. His wife is an Upper West Side intellectual, having married below her station but seeing something inspiring and apocryphal and incipiently opportunity-providing in this endless nothingness. She is also at once a doting and somewhat detached mother.

The narrator is their adolescent son, one of two twins, who sees a queasy chaos in this benighted grassland, and attempts to make it cohere with pattern focused hobbies like chess and beekeeping. He craves a pattern for the wheat-sea's formlessness, beating back with games and strategies the lassitude that may doom him to being one of Cather's 'Obscure destinies.'

Their father sells cars but sweetens his income with gray market [read: stolen] sides of beef slaughtered and smuggled by local Indians. When he gets deep in hock with them and is warned to make good if he values the safety of his family, he hatches a plan to rob a bank just across the state line in even less hospitable North Dakota. He and the wife do just that, are trailed and reported and arrested; not to worry, this is all unspooled in the first pages of the book. Much of the novel then consists of the son Dell's ruminations of what happened, what could or should have happened, and on the terrifying force and effect of sudden, unforeseeable shifts in fortune—-the razor's edge between psychic peace and the make-do backwash we flounder in just after catastrophe.

Before the parents are tried and sentenced to their North Dakota penitentiary bids, Dell's sister runs off to San Francisco and the boy is transported—before he can be adjudged a ward of the state—to live with his mother's relative's relative in far Northern Saskatchewan. Here, the metaphorical underpinnings of the book—-crossing borders, leaping boundaries—-comes to its acme, and the narrator wonders at his fate and its possible directions of resolve. He does all this thinking as a sort of child slave, having ben apprenticed to a jack of all trades named Remlinger, a cunning American exile whose shady past parallels those of Dell's parents, the figures who got caught, whose couldn't get away.



Remlinger's own schemes, and what caused him to come to rest as a flim-flam man and Dell's rescuer, unfold in an ultimately cumbersome wrap-up that we need not go into here. What fascinates about the book is its unique style, and its skillful characterizations not only of people, but, much like in Hardy, the harsh landscape in which they find (or send) themselves.

Richard Ford and friends in Oxford, missippi
(Photograph by Fred R. Conrad, The New York Times*)*

Dell speaks with a single voice, but with two vocalizations, ranging, sometimes in the space of a single page, between the guileless view of an astonished 13-year-old and that of the more somber, philosophical register of the actual writer of the narrative, the much older Dell and Ford's diffidently exploring, morally Socratic stand-in. The effect is dazzling, with the man-child's unassuming, flatly descriptive major chords colored deftly by the minor notes of the summarizing elder. This is a prairie of the imagination, with bold columns of confident sun tempered by shadows of doubt, by the constant positing of counterfactuals and what might have been if just a different road—-never mind the 'right' or 'wrong' one—-had been taken through the mirage-making, dizzying grasses. Indeed, Dell is something like the boy narrator of Chekhov's great novella 'The Steppe'—-young enough to still appreciate and invest in his will, old enough to know the terrible constraints of external circumstance.

The second stylistic device is Ford's ability to conjure life-changing, fate-sealing instants with the gentle voice of a master questioner, the constantly self-searching doubter and then just as effective re-affirmer of his conjectures. There is controversy with the self, but there are no gnarled, edgy sounds scraping up against the singing lines here. There is only the mellifluous, smooth, utterly diffident sub-speech of the inquisitor constantly interrogating himself. Dell old and young is a whispering, mellowed Hamlet. The debates with himself, their transcendental atmospherics, make Ford the heir to two other masters of this style—-Peter Taylor and especially Robert Maxwell (whose influence he stresses in the acknowledgments.)

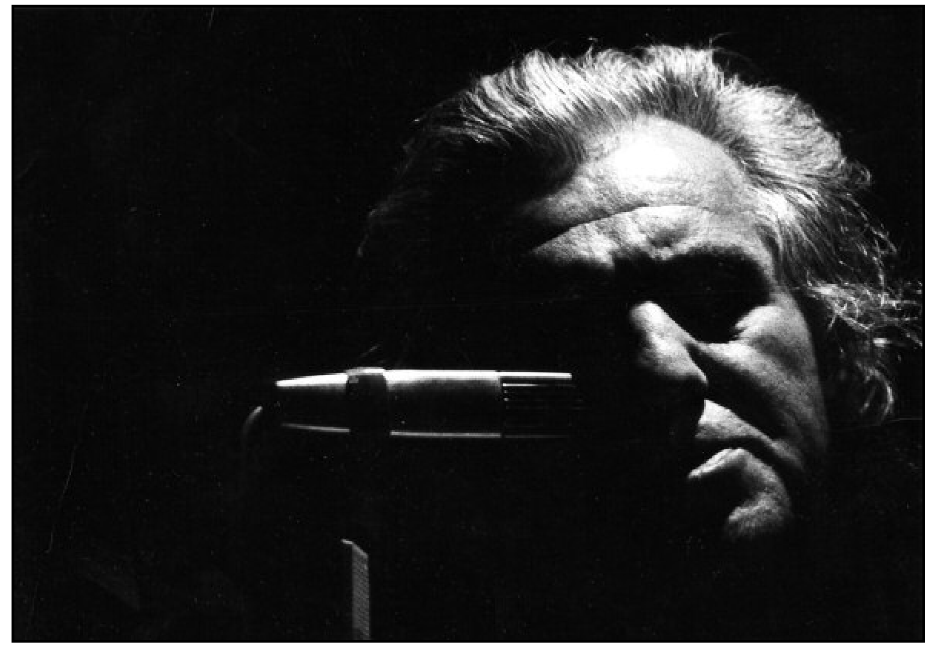
The Maxwell comparison is the highest compliment I can pay to a writer. And *Canada* may be Ford's best book yet, this coming from someone who regards his Bascombe Trilogy, along with Updike's Rabbit novels, as the chronicles that readers in one hundred, two hundred years will consult to see how we lived, to feel our texture as a society, and to understand what borders we were given to cross.

Richard Wirick is the author of the novel* One Hundred Siberian Postcards *(Telegraph Books). He has been published in* Paris Review *and* The Nation. *He practices law in Los Angeles.

A Great Soul

Doug Beardsley

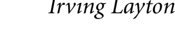
The recent centenary of Irving Layton’s birth brought tributes from all across Canada and around the world. Fellow poets, former students, and avid readers gathered in Victoria, BC, among other places, to celebrate the poet and teacher who inspired so many of us who had the good fortune to know the man and his “craft and sullen art.”



Irving Layton

Layton’s need to become one with the 20th century knew no bounds. We spent many hours trading records and listening to the music of Shostakovich and Prokofiev, those two great Russian chroniclers of our barbarous century. One evening Irving announced that the reference books had got it wrong; his birthday was March 5th, not March 12th. He persisted to promulgate this myth for several years because we discovered that Prokofiev and Stalin had not only died on the same day, March 5th, but within one hour of each other. However, the Russian composer had died first, having been deprived of the knowledge of Stalin’s demise. Irving was outraged that such a social injustice could have occurred. But he also took it as a personal injustice. He saw his own place in the order of things to be so central he willed himself to believe that he had been born a week earlier, so he too could feel in harmony – or disharmony – with the temper of the times.

The first poem of Layton’s I encountered, over fifty years ago, was “On First Seeing the Statuettes of Ezekiel and Jeremiah in the Church of Notre Dame.” I was familiar with the church from my early visits as a teenager when I had been taken up by the mystery of the translucent light that seemed to emanate from the sanctuary, a blue light that offered up the hope of another world beyond our own. But I too had been struck by the incongruity of those two Old Testament prophets sitting astride one of the cold, grey, cement columns of this Catholic Cathedral. Layton’s poem spoke of an appropriation that I considered to be outright theft (I have since changed my mind) but I couldn’t help but be attracted to the creative curiosity that would centre on such a small detail in the overall scheme of the church and imagine it into a powerful work of art. I remember being struck by the feeling that these two “sultry prophets” had found a contemporary companion, another “hot Hebrew heart” with whom they could converse. I could not help but be struck by the emphatic authority of his language. Irving would often proclaim that the poet “was a prophet and a descendant of prophets,” especially in our troubled time, though he realized that a prophet had no place in 20th century society. Except as witness.



Irving Layton

Decades before the Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz lectured on and published “The Witness of Poetry”, Layton had considerable ‘second-hand experience’ of the Holocaust through his work with survivors who had made it to Montreal and was “bearing witness” through his poems. His Romanian birth gave him an empathic sense of their European background and, out of respect for those who were murdered and those who had suffered “all of Europe’s poison,” Irving taught survivors English and helped them adapt to Canadian culture.

Layton the poet was a permanent presence. He saw the poet as the conscience of humankind, a fact, he said, well-known to Stalin and Hitler. I remember the time that Al Purdy and I decided to put together an anthology of modern poetry. We’d choose a poet a week (Donne, Lawrence, Yeats, Eliot, Thomas, Plath, Page, Webb, among others), read all of his or her work, then meet for an extended liquid lunch to compare our lists of “excellent poems” and agree on what two or three or six would make it into our imaginary anthology. Most often we were in agreement, but the catch was that both had to be convinced. Naturally, this led to a great deal of back-and-forth of enjoyable banter. Most poets ended up with from three-to-six poems. When we reviewed Layton’s work we were astonished to find we both had an opening list of three dozen from which to choose. Was Layton really that good? Grudgingly, Al admitted that it was so.

Over a 40-year relationship that evolved from student-teacher through friendship to fellowship to his calling me brother, I gained the benefit of his over-whelming intelligence, his deep sense of morality, and the precision and clarity of his thought that led to the passion – and compassion – of his best poems. Layton knew what it meant to be fully human and this gave him an intimate knowledge of the human condition; he always tried to give us, in Kenneth Burke’s phrase, “the equipment for living” in a world that (to quote Eliot), “cannot bear very much reality.” His greatest wish was to convert the world to a larger self-awareness in order to bring about a more compassionate community.

During the mid-1960s, Irving became enamoured with the work of European filmmakers such as Bergman, Fellini and Michelangelo Antonioni, who he saw as “poets with cameras in their fists,” seeing the world through image and symbol. Many years later, while visiting Roma, Irving and his beloved Anna became honoured guests at a dinner for Frederico Fellini. A Fellini entourage of 40 was in attendance, dutifully bowing and scraping before the Master and hanging upon his every word. After-dinner toasts were made and Irving was asked to address the group. Rising to his feet – and the occasion – Layton launched into a quarter-hour dissection of every image and symbol Fellini had employed in his most recent filming of “Casanova”, then sat down. The table fell into stunned silence; all heads turned toward Fellini with fear and trembling as to what the Master would say. After all, no one dared talk to Fellini in this way. The great film director rose to his feet, stared down at Irving, then threw his triumphant matador’s cape across his body and exclaimed: “What do you say to a man who has stripped you naked?” The entire table rose as one, burst into applause, and raised their glasses shouting: “Viva, Layton! Viva, Layton!” Years later, Irving said it had been one of the greatest moments of his life.

On the rare occasion I had some disagreement with Layton I reread “King Lear.” I learned to drop the ‘King’ – those that didn’t quickly disappeared – but I never lost sight of the ‘Lear’ in Layton. What does greatness do when it grows old and there is nothing more to teach or learn about life? It descends into madness. Or it eats, sleeps, sits in silence and closes its eyes.

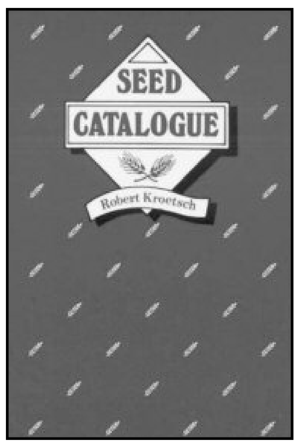
The last time I saw him face to face was three months before he died. We were in Maimonides home for the aged in Montreal. I fed him pizza and talked incessantly about the many years we’d spent together. His eyes never opened. But by the way he squeezed my arm I knew he heard every word. I told him I loved him. And then Irving looked at me and uttered the first words he had spoken in several months. He said, “I know.” He wept. I wept. And I kissed him on the forehead, like he used to do when he blessed me.

Doug Beardsley is the author of eleven volumes of poetry. He studied at Sir George Williams University where he came under the poetic tutelage of Irving Layton, with whom he corresponded until Layton’s death in 2006. He lives in Victoria.

Seed Catalogue in an Italian-Canadian Garden: Homage as Montage

Carmelo Militano

I doubt these days there are many poets, writers, teachers, ranch-hands, or gardeners, and anyone in between who think Robert Kroetsch is not an important and sophisticated poet, nor someone who has made a significant contribution to Canadian letters as a writing mentor, teacher of literature, and booster of Western Canadian culture. Kroetsch would be the first to point out an over abundance of self-consciousness kills good writing.



Seed Catalogue
Robert Kroetsch
Turnstone Press
1986

But, it is Kroetsch's playful awareness of literary tradition, (and his own ironic self awareness) where poetry and culture sit in relation to the over-all hard facts of prairie life in terms of history, geography, labour, climate, in short, the difficult business of farming, how all of this can stack up and sit in opposition to the creating of a literature or poetics that honors rural prairie life and place.

And/ or worse, there are those who see themselves as cosmopolitan and urbane and dismiss the rural voice as unsophisticated and finally there are those who accept or adopt the literary traditions of high culture and view prairie poetry as the expression of a backward hayseed hinterland. Best to ignore a place that is dull and mundane, so the thinking goes, and let us instead consider the big universal themes of love, death, sex, and existence.

But, the wonder is how Kroetsch is able to confront these difficulties and attitudes. *Seed Catalogue* makes absence a presence: 'How do you grow a poet?' in such unfertile soil. The question is part of the poetic answer; the complete answer, of course, is the poem *Seed Catalogue.*

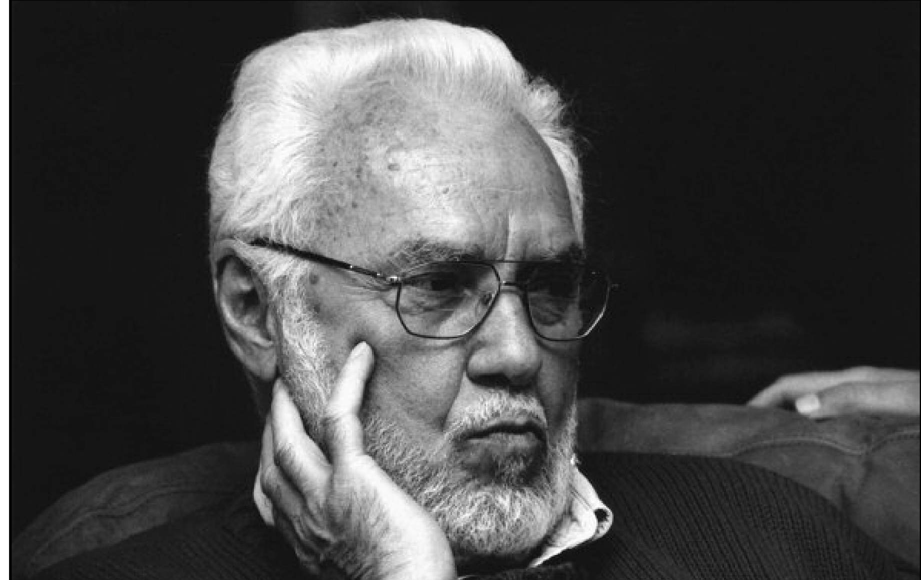
And the wonder of *Seed Catalogue* is how in answering this question Kroetsch incorporates, to name just a few of his images and themes, the cold and blankness of winter, the serendipity and vagaries of farm life and its quirky accidents (falling off a horse), the painful symmetries of family and European history, and his adolescent sexual awakening. In other words, the answer is a hash or stew of anecdote, memory, landscape, desire, and remembered childhood rich in comical incident

But the answer also includes 'found' rhymes and jokes, suggestive metaphors, and the skillful positioning of McKenzie seed catalogue plant descriptions to create a panoramic view of prairie life. The answer includes the understanding, as we shall see, that you grow a poet by mixing memory with desire, to paraphrase T.S.Eliot, the poet/priest of high culture and modernism.

> *Start: with an invocation*
> *invoke-*
>
> *His muse is*
> *His muse/if*
> *memory is*
>
> *and you have*
> *no memory then*
> *no meditation*
> *no song (shit*
> *we're up against it)*

What can the poet say if there is nothing to evoke, no memory, or even know what to say? How is a poet supposed to write a poem if there is neither 'meditation' nor a written representation (or example) to either react against or for the poet's rural experience or to suggest how the poet's experience can be collected and valued in a poem.

The answer is in the next stanza; it is grounded (down to earth?) in a series of remembered comical erotic adolescent scenes filled with typical prairie details and language: 'a school barn', 'Hastings' slough' and she was wearing 'so much underwear', (after all winter in Western Canada is cold) it was impossible to get close to her and past her 'CCM skates.'



Robert Kroetsch

And you also answer the question 'How do you grow a poet' by suggesting the work on the land, the shaping of a field, the defining of boundaries with 'barbed wire,' 'staples,' 'claw hammer,' and 'fencepost' all the hammering and shaping parallels the making of a poem. The land a blank page on which Kroetsch's ancestors wrote their poems.

But, Kroetsch also is urgent about the need to write what we have not written about; he sees the importance and necessity of (re) imagining the past, 'the home place,' and making it real. There is also the importance of knowing where to look for history; in *Seed Catalogue* the writer Rudy Wiebe is considered a significant guide to where to look for the past.

Uncle Freddie, who did not have enough money to buy a pound of coffee, is an example of using the imagination to create the real.

> *Every morning at breakfast*
> *he drank a cup of hot water*
> *with cream and sugar in it.*

Kroetsch as a young boy finds this curious and asks why.

Uncle Freddie, a gentle man answers, "Don't you understand anything?"

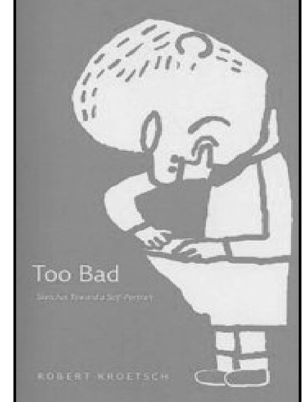
Or, don't you see the importance and power of the imagination in the act of creating, and in this case, imagining 'real' coffee. In short, it is necessary for us to imagine the real, oddly, to construct the real.

And at the same time Kroetsch understands poetry has limits. Poetry cannot construct a landscape, that is, "break up that space with huge design and, like the fiction of the Russian steppes, build a giant artifact." Nor can poetry create or be a substitute for friendship and camaraderie between Purdy and Kroetsch in the same way, say, a serious round of drinking and reciting poetry can be important to two poets: " No song can do that" writes Kroetsch. *Seed Catalogue*'s attitude towards itself as a poem and poetry is playful; on the one hand it affirms the need and value of poetry in creating the real, and indirectly identity, and at the same time it challenges the value of poetry and its abilities to transform or reflect experience. The poem, like the poet, plays with itself.

But you may ask what in the world does all this poetic complexity have to do with an Italian-Canadian living in a large urban prairie city.

I am, of course, referring to myself (a slippery concept Kroetsch would argue by the way) and I think it is useful to see *Seed Catalogue* not only as seriocomic long poem about Kroetsch search for a way to write about his specific past. *Seed Catalogue* can also be understood as a kind of aesthetic manifesto; its aesthetic values strive to broaden the net by which we define culture, experience, and ultimately ourselves. The ase-

thetetics of High Culture and modernism tend to be very particular about what is let in as art and even sometimes what it lets out as art. Kroetsch's writing suggests, as we say in Italian, "tutto fa brodo," "everything makes a soup," that is, everything can be included in a poem the high, low, and everything in between. Kroetsch makes it clear that the culture of the prairies is rich in imagination, character, and incident. The place were you live, the stories of people and places, the voices and jokes, the food you ate, the arguments over money, the weather endured, the lost Old World, language, the relentless beat of spiking down track, your memories, scraps of your parent's memories, the growing literally of a garden, the smell of crushed grapes in the fall, all of this and more was/is valid.



Too Bad

And this is a very liberating attitude or perspective especially if you are starting out as a writer and believed, like I did, that books were written in places rich in literary tradition like London, New York, or Paris. Writers were sophisticated people who had a gift and power other mere mortals simply did not possess. How they acquired this gift was a mystery. They lived in homes with original art on the wall bought cheap at the beginning of some famous artist's career and worked in book-lined studies. I imagined their apartments where hardcover books lay causally about on the edges of big soft brown couches. At parties the women were tall and angular with acidic tongues; the men looked rumpled and were intelligent. Whenever someone spoke, out fell a profound insight or a *bon mot.* How could I, from a rural Italian family who came from a small obscure village in Southern Italy to a large urban prairie city, ever hope to become part of the witty, sophisticated, and progressive world of Art and Literature?

My mother worked in a clothing factory sewing zippers onto bulky green winter coats. My father worked as a section man for the railway cleaning snow off switches in the winter and replacing ties and rail in the summer. Indeed, 'how do you grow a poet?' It seemed impossible.

But Kroetsch's pointed a way out. It was okay to write about neglected rural Southern Italy life. Hell, poets grow best when neglected.

Seed Catalogue quietly and urgently stated it was also okay (and therefore I was free) to write about and use agricultural themes and images, in my case rural Calabria and the family garden.

And the writing did not have to restrict itself to a maudlin tragic view, a kind of dark Catholicism that characterized early Italian-Canadian literature where characters found themselves cast out of the Eden of their homeland and adrift in the bewildering landscape of a large modern urban city. The clash of generation—between fathers and sons, mothers and daughters—was portrayed in the literature as another bitter layer of disappointment to be endured in a foreign country. Kroetsch's poetry, on the other hand, was full of wit, puns, bits of lyric, history, personal memory, guffaws, roars, and a sly cold eye on the truth and an almost hyper self-awareness.

Robert Kroetsch

The voice in *Seed Catalogue* and the long poem *The Sad Phoenician* is a clever mix of rural perspective and sophisticated cultural knowledge. The voice in both poems manages to glue together the attitudes and experiences of the rural sly prairie farmer (or 'contandi') to the outlook, experience, and book knowledge of the city intellectual. In both poems Kroetsch addressed, directly and indirectly, my own conflicts and confusions about the writing life: What to write about? How do I presume to write? Does anyone in the capital care to know about a past rural Southern Italian culture? Working with your arms, hands, and back is real work compared to reading, thinking, and writing is it not?

I was only to hear much later about the successful American writer Philip Roth who quipped in an interview how he was surprised so many people were interested in reading about Jewish-American life.

But, the poems addressed these conflicts and opposites I was trying to reconcile: the rural Calabrian traditions and culture of my parents versus my university education and my acceptance of English speaking Canadian culture. Intellectual work versus physical work, rejected Calabria versus embraced Tuscany, the internationally known art cities of Rome and Florence versus the obscure unknown villages of my parents, Cosoleto and Aquarro, the here and now of Canada, versus remembered and imagined Southern Italy.

The large lost garden plots of Italy compared to the small garden in the backyard beside the garage.

Kroetsch's response was simple; break away from the long shadow of tradition and start or write your own tradition. Too much reverence for the past creates paralysis in a writer especially at the beginning of his writing career.

All of what I have just said is old news. The aesthetic vision articulated in

Seed Catalogue is more or less the norm and accepted, especially the value and importance of the prairie voice. Walk into any bookstore and the evidence is all there. There is a cornucopia of writers, poets, artists, photographers, many published (planted?) by local presses, banishing the absence, rejecting the neglect. Or to quote William Blake: " What is real now was once only imagined."

Kroetsch's radical reworking of the long poem – some would say myth making – is no longer radical although still fresh.

But I would say there is still an absence and the absence will always sit in the very heart of the literary enterprise. The rejection, the fear of failure, neglect, and ultimately the confrontation with nothingness; out of such an un-fertile mix somehow you can still grow a poet and imagine the real

And when I finally sat down to write about my agrarian rural Italian family- I agree with Bob on this point, writers are slow learners – this is one of the poems that is a raised fist against nothingness and time. It is from my book 'The Fate of Olives' although I should add the book is primarily prose and uses poems as a kind of connective tissue to hold the various prose pieces together.

Carmelo Militano is a Winnipeg poet, writer, and essayist. He has published three poetry colections and a prose work 'The Fate of Olives' which was short-listed for two different literary awards. His latest work is 'Weather Reports'(Olive Press) a collection of erotic and near erotic poems.

After Reading 'The Sad Phoenician:' A Fragment for Antonio Foti

a poem by Carmelo Militano

"…how do you grow a poet?"
Robert Kroetsch

I too fear other people's definitions, farting after dinner
Peeing indiscreetly on the neighbour's lawn but
I am Italian born
Raised in Winnipeg, that sober city
On the banks of two muddy rivers
Never heard of Boulevard St.Michel
Until I was twenty-one, by then it was too late for café society
But did Hemingway lose his way? Did Sartre fart?
Instead I ate a lonely dinner every night
In the Restaurant Des Balkans at the corner of Rue St. Jacques and
Boulevard St. Germain asking why I wasn't laid and
Read poetry hoping to find the line that would sum up my life
And lead to the well-read woman
Whose pubic hairs would shine like a morning lawn in late August
But to answer your question
You grow a poet on Langside Street
Mrs. Cheekly on one side of the house
The blind father of the postman on the other
Pasta for dinner every Thursday and Sunday after mass
Tomatoes, beans, and peppers growing in the backyard
And when you and I did walk through the garden in Italy
The red dirt was a surprise after the grey of the prairies
(What colour was the clay God used to make you?)
Later we sat down in the tool shed at the garden's edge
Opened the catalogue from Reggio to the middle
(like the old one from Eaton's)
Where pages of black and white photos of women
In their underwear lay and you asked the ancient questions:
"What have you seen and what does it mean?"
The sun glowed in front of us like a solitary orange heart
And below us the grey and green olive trees were silent.

Yolande Villemaire in Translation

Linda Rogers

Psychologists report that a creative brain is a happier brain; and contrary anecdotal information about deviant genius may just be evidence of the struggle to elevate endorphin levels. The creative brain is curious and curiosity is the impetus for the protean canon of Quebecoise poet, novelist, critic and actor feminist Yolande Villemaire whose Amazonian characters stalk bliss through discovery of their spiritual and historic selves while traveling through phenomenal and mythological landscapes.

Her appropriate epigraph for the travel narrative, *Midnight Tides of Amsterdam*, first in a trilogy about the restless painter Miliana, is from Vincent Van Gogh:

> We fortunately discover the right path
> through our wandering, and good may
> come from any movement.

Villemaire, a public artist, intends to create community in these stories, where visual and literary artists have sexual and spiritual congress, cross-pollinating verdant journeys through the music of time to a greater collective wisdom.

The artist protagonist in the three volumes published as movements in a symphony by Ekstasis Editions, is, like Leonard Cohen's Mohawk princess, a reference to earlier mythologies. Miliana, the daughter of an alcoholic First Nations mother and absent Polish father, is herself an inter-disciplinary inter-cultural lust project abandoned in infancy.

Adopted and raised by sensible people, Miliana deliberately aborts normalcy, reverting to the green screen of history as her point of reference in the present. As she motors through landscapes of virtual reality, memory and desire, she is in a state of constant anxiety. Everyone she encounters is a potential candidate for her list of *ists and asts:* terrorists, pederasts, and misogynists.

Family is a string of pearls, one strung out woman after another and she calls them all Amazons, upper case and lower case, depending on the position in the pantheon of female martyr-warriors.

The disconnected sobbing voice on her phone is the mother who gave her up; her child, who wails over the nursery intercom, is heir to the history of a father who survived the horror of Sarajevo with post-traumatic stress syndrome. They are all tears from the sea we came from.

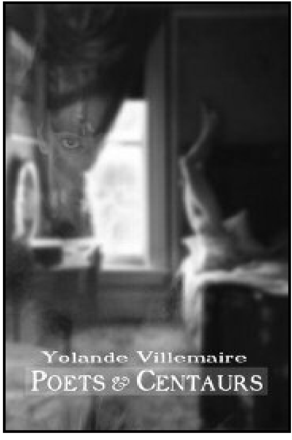
To paraphrase Isaiah, when the mother (Rosetta) eats sour grapes, the daughter's teeth are set on edge. There is no rock foundation (*pierre* in her second language) for her inner child.

> *My mother who didn't protect me from little Pierre, the Rosetta stone in the main hierogyphics of my fear. Pierre, thou art Peter and upon this rock I shall build my church of silence and of terror.*
> *(Poets and Centaurs)*

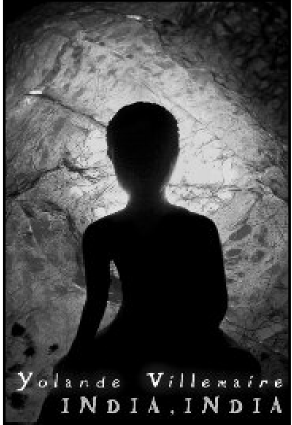
Whether Miliana translates herself to Montreal, Amsterdam, Mexico City or Delhi, it makes no difference; she cannot escape the distraught voices of her past and present.

The city of Sarajevo, from which Dragan, Miliana's disturbed sculptor lover, is in exile, is named for its romantic past, the *caravanserai* where Silk Road voyageurs rested themselves and their camels for the road ahead. Ironically, there is no resting place

Yolande Villemaire, trans. by Leonard Sugden, Ekstasis Editions, the trilogy *Midnight Tides of Amsterda*m, 2004, *Poets and Centaurs*, 2006, and *India, India*, 2009, and *Little Red Berries*, 2007



Poets and Centaurs



India, India

Yolande Villemaire

for the questors in Miliana's agitated imagination. They are all kinetic energy, doomed to unrequited longing and frantic creativity.

The trilogy written in the French *roman* idiom projects impressions on the screen where shadows of past, present and future interplay. They wreak havoc with the insecure warrior woman who attempts, without success, to control her own narrative.

Her neurosis is the irony of quest stories populated by modern *commedia dell'arte* characters, her centaurs and small a amazons all engaged in epic self-involvement. She is, after all, only part of an entertainment and not a catalyst for change.

Paralysis is the by-product of narcissism and none of Miliana's compadres evolve, because her fear is the sting of inertia. Perhaps this is another reason for story fragmentation, the impressionist conventions of modern French prose as opposed to a feminist *Odyssey* expelled on one large gastric bubble like Joyce's masterful *Ulysses*. The warrior-writer may be afraid for the survival of a child that stumbles from one archetype to the next. Better to present her postcard life experience in enigmatic collage.

Villemaire is a quintessential Quebecois writer of the first post-catholic post-feminist generation struggling to transcend and re-create a society literally and metaphorically buggered by centaurs in god/dog collars. Sarajevo has a place in this construct. Miliana and Dragan, who appears and disappears at her will, both lost in post-Armageddon landcapes, strive to create new realities and boot up their endorphin-starved minds for another chapter in the life of wo(man).

Miliana, the neurotic and controlling mother, behaves irresponsibly, leaving her child, the next generation Amazon, in the care of a potentially violent father traumatized by civil war, to seek meaning in the cheapest of stereotypes, ashrams popularized by pop stars, and poets who are, in spite of the literary assertion of their feminine sides, half beast. We watch her with vicarious horror. She is doomed to mediocrity, living on the leftovers of popular culture and popular psychology.

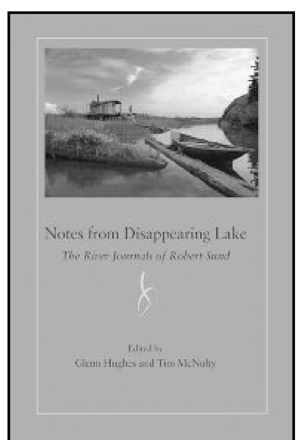
This must be the despair of Yolande Villemaire. With her actor's gift for mimicry and poet's painterly vision, she creates credible dream worlds; but dreams shatter in the mirror of morning. Poets and centaurs go round and round, imitating nature, and we must return to Van Gogh. Good may come from any movement, but not necessarily. This is the epigraph for an artist who wishes for change but is compelled to witness the dog/god still chasing its tail. There may be no way out of the circle.

> *She squeezes a tube of indigo on her palette and gives the man's skin the dark blue tone of the Buddha of healing. She paints with fire and passion, freed from ime to time and still traveling in your mystery…*
> *(India, India)*

(*continued on page 38*)

Notes from Disappearing Lake

Michael Daley



Notes from Disappearing Lake: The River Journals of Robert Sund
Edited by Glenn Hughes and Tim McNulty
Pleasure Boat Studio
$15.00, 98 pages

For Henry David Thoreau's poems at Walden Pond read Robert Sund's *Notes from Disappearing Lake*. Had Thoreau been less of an explainer, and less obsessed with teaching his fellow men and neighbors, his astute observations in Walden might well have been refined to the minutely focused, musical poems Sund wrote by way of journal entries. By contrast, if Walden was Thoreau's response to several months building and then living in his own shack at the pond, Sund's journals span fourteen years of his life, and also include the renovation of his shack, originally the net shed for fishers along the Skagit River. Thoreau, however, did see it through for two New England winters, while Sund spent those winters in the town with friends. Robert Sund is on the way to publishing more books after death than in life. His first book, *Bunch Grass*, was published by the University of Washington Press in 1969, while his next, *Ish River*, for which he was awarded the Washington State Governor's Writing Award, was published by North Point Press in 1983. Although he published several chapbooks, his posthumous collected poems, *Poems from Ish River Country* (Shoemaker & Hoard), came out in 2004, and *Taos Mountain* (Poet's House Press) in 2007. He was widely regarded as the unofficial poet laureate of Western Washington.

Though *Notes from Disappearing Lake* is a collection of the best of daily entries over so long a time, culled and introduced by Tim McNulty and Glenn Hughes, it is fair to assume that entries not selected for this volume were also written as poems or prose commentary. The editors tell us, "For most of the 70s and 80s Sund spent part of each year at his shack in the tidal marsh and estuary of the Skagit River. His small shack was only a short row from nearby La Conner, Washington…" So, like Thoreau, he went frequently back to 'civilization,' and though sometimes in his hermitage, he did not lack the comforts of human contact, and did in fact, as evidenced in many of the entries, steep himself in the joys and lives of others.

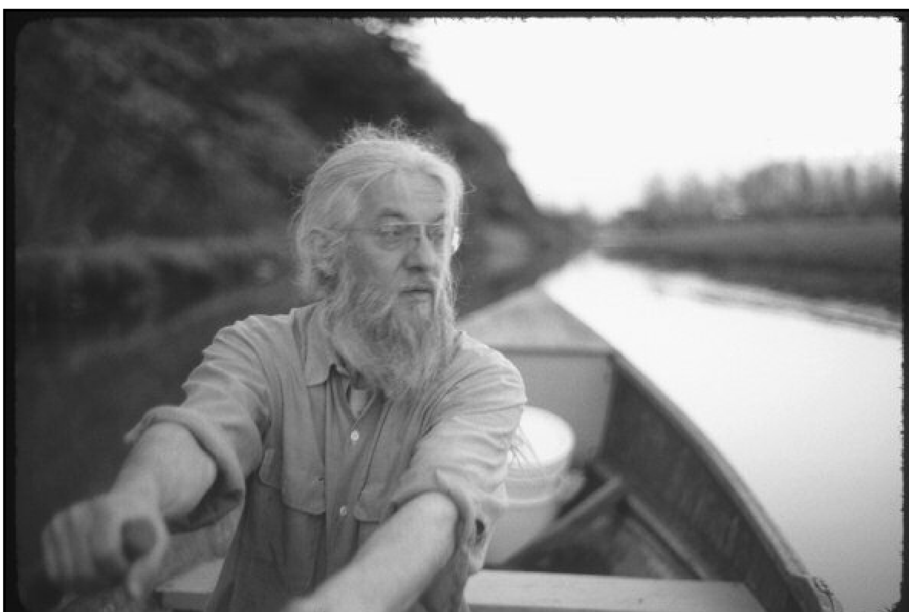
There's something to be said for keeping a journal in daily or frequent poetic form. "The River Journals" represents, one would think, a practice of observation, emotion, and gestures; it depicts a life lived otherwise, away from the world, for there are no mentions of the news of the day— whose regime, which wars, the cost of gas, bread, wine, no intrusions by government and media. In his October 4, 1978, entry, Sund meets poet, painter and translator, Paul Hansen on a day when both made trips to town:

> *"We look at the world—*
> *something in the newspaper, maybe—*
> *shake our heads and*
> *break out laughing.."*

The image of Zen monks comes to mind as it does frequently in the book, hermit poets who removed themselves from the pace of the street, the influence of "the world." Two stanzas later, Sund issues first a gentle, prosaic comment on their laughter at news events defining the lives of others, and then with more precise, clinical detachment employs an image at once stinging and rife with the freedom of flight:

> *You could call it*
> *ritual:*
> *shaking off the*
> *dust of the world—*
>
> *Like the heron*
> *picking lice out of*
> *his wingfeathers.*

Although there are some brief narratives in these journals—arrivals, travels and meetings with friends, encounters with mice, with a weasel, with swallows, and



Robert Sund rowing on the Disappearing Lake

geese—*Notes from Disappearing Lake* reads like a primer in embellished lyrical form. Sund uses his front porch frequently, or the stillness at night, to capture the sound of migrations, of wind in marsh grass, of moon and cloud. The poems form an impressionist's gallery, evident from the name he gave the estuary he saw change with the years. It would be misleading to overlook the narrative—fourteen years in the life of a poet prepared for beauty, awaiting both a tidal and a personal change, is the story here, much as he did in Bunch Grass where Sund lays down his "songs" during the defined period of the wheat harvest in Eastern Washington. The book has several poems about gathering materials from "the lumberyard," that is, salvaging planks with "tarpaper still hanging" from another shack too far gone to restore, or about the pleasures of a roof that doesn't leak, of relocating mice and even trying to coax swallows to nest elsewhere. He speaks of being alone and in two poems combines missing someone with a change he notes in his own spirit. This entry, dated May 10, 1981, seems thematic:

> *If you're a friend of mine*
> *and remember me otherwise—*
>
> *It was the time I lost the light*
> *and was stumbling on the way home.*
> …
> *Things change*
> *things change*
> *and I see my life going for the better.*
>
> *An ancient wave breaks over me.*

And later, on May 23, of the same year, in one of the few titled entries, "Lily":

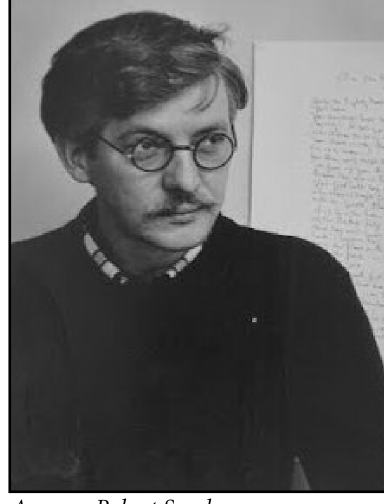
> *There is no use fooling myself.*
> *Something is happening.*
> *My old self and*
> *my new self*
> *are having a long look at*
> *one another.*
> *They are having long, long looks.*

Months later, in October, Sund writes an entry precisely acknowledging his dedication to poetry and the cost he must pay for it:

> *Rowing upriver, I thought of you.*
> *You are gone like the summer,*
> *and I am alone.*

The oarlocks creak
in the foggy silence,
the river still and dark.
… … …
Both banks
are foggy and dark.
I stay warm rowing my boat.

Sund records the changing years by recognizing his birthdays and that he's been on the river for ten years. Yet it seems changes he notices are not those we associate with aging, or maturity. It was a mature decision to enter into this life at forty-four, to step away from the call of academe, and the illusions of renown. Instead, he demonstrates a recognition of this value which, though it arose long before coming to Disappearing Lake, he articulates clearly on April 3, 1979. He calls it devotion. This may be one of the most didactic poems of the collection, yet it reminds me of a George Oppen statement. Certainly the least didactic of poets, Oppen kept a journal called "Daybooks". In an entry to his first Daybook, written in the early 1960s, he writes how the mind can be dedicated to poetry: "At least two kinds of devotion. The devotion to art, a sort of pragmatism of art which refuses to think anything which will not contribute to poetry. The other is a devotion which makes poetry of what the mind, the free and operating mind *can* know—know—*and is going to know*." I think of the way a computer or an electrical service can be referred to as "dedicated," and understand Oppen to mean something like this, that is, not so much in an emotional sense, one in which the mind must constantly attempt to persuade others, but the mind available, continuously, to its voluptuous art. Sund came to his devotion, and expresses it as a process, somewhat as Thoreau might have, if more succinctly:



A young Robert Sund

The man who is not devoted:
he knows neither himself
nor what he has turned his back on.

The mysteries
are all words to him.
There is only a series
of cheap transactions
going on inside.

Before concluding, I hasten to remind readers that this book is composed of Sund's journal entries, and that the poems we find here, unlike those in *Poems from Ish River Country*, for instance, can easily be termed "less polished." True, some became drafts for *Shack Medicine*, and many entries were drafts to work on or discard, yet Sund's technical gifts are evident throughout. One example from *Poems from Ish River Country* illustrates a practice he employed frequently. In "Just Before Sleep, I Dream of my Grandfather returned to His Farm in the Early Spring," the line "he liked to tromp lopsided in a furrow" shows he knew his way around a vowel, the line packed then softened by alliteration or sibilance: "behind his horses…" He ends this poem using the same technique: a vowel driven rhythm, then alliterative with internal vowel rhyme, concluding with the matter-of-fact:

In the corner of the woodshed near the house
patches of powdery mold
are spreading
over his work shoes

Shoes the poet no doubt wanted to fill. In Notes he shifts again between aural qualities, in this case in an undated poem, and the prosaic:

Winter weeds
outside my shack,
High water
in the windy morning.

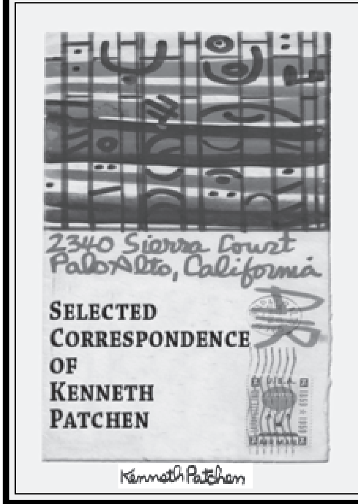
The tops of marsh grass
stick up
above the 12-foot tide.

In the wind, bent grass
writes on the crests of waves.
I sit alone with
my first cup of tea.

The W sounds of wind reinforce what he was hearing so much so we are prepared for the grass like a poet who leaves nothing behind. I'm reminded of Chinese monks who left their poems strung from branches to weather, and Sund's own calligraphed "Wind poems." A lesser ear would have heard "rides" instead of "writes," and a dramatic poet, "writhes."

Robert Sund's *Notes from Disappearing Lake* is remarkable less for the fine work Hughes and McNulty have uncovered from his journals, and not even so much because his practice led first of all to his chapbook, *Shack Medicine*, in which Sund himself selected the very best from these journals, but the journals are remarkable because he wrote them seemingly without audience. A poet who chooses such a hermitage "turns his back on" not only the world, its "dust," its "lice in his wingfeathers," but on its ears and the aspirations he might have had to a public voice. He abandons the ever-present need for audience to devote himself to beauty alone; for this we can be thankful.

Michael Daley was born in Boston, is theauthor of three books of poems, a book of essays and several chapbooks, his work has appeared in Ajournals and on Garrison Keilor s Writer s Almanac. In 2001 he received a Fulbright grant to live in Hungary for a year. His most recent book is Moonlight in the Redemptive Forest.



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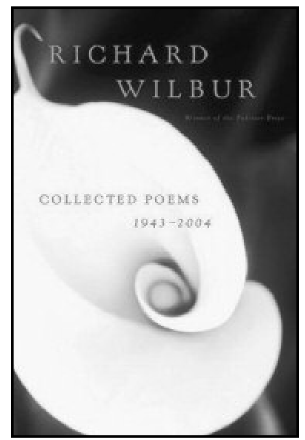
Making a Case for Formal Wit and Grace

Doug Beardsley



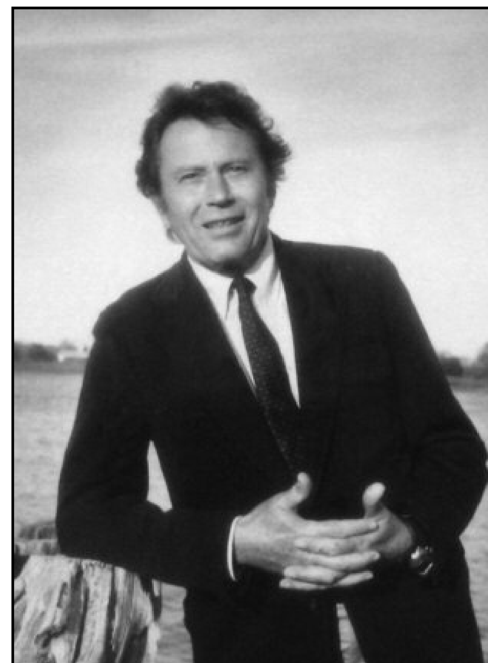
Collected Poems: 1943-2004
Richard Wilbur
Harcourt
608 pages

The East Coast poet is over 90 now, still very much with us. In reading his collected poems of over six decades, I was struck by the fact that the poems are offered to the reader in reverse chronological order. And yet, in the movement from work that is most recent back to the beginning (shades of Eliot here), what is most interesting is the uniformity of excellence throughout. Wilbur's high level of craftsmanship is fused with a deep sense of mystery that surrounds his best poems in a life-giving affirmation; an embrace that is both a homage to creativity and to Creation.

Al Purdy once exclaimed that if a poet wrote half-a-dozen great poems, he or she had achieved immortality. When Irving Layton was told of Purdy's remark he erupted: "Al said this? Are you sure? Al is a very generous guy. One or two great poems would earn a poet immortality."

The modern American poet Richard Wilbur has made two such poems that will live forever. Composed in the middle of his career, in the mid-1950s, "Love Calls Us To The Things Of This World" and "A Christmas Hymn" represent the very apogee of Wilbur's art, and elevate him to the status of a major voice in modern American poetry.

Like a tightrope walker, Richard Wilbur has always attempted to achieve the "difficult balance" between the reality of this world and the next. The nuns in "Love Calls Us to the Things of This World" manage to maintain "their difficult balance" despite "their dark habits," a veiled reference to the temptations of contemporary society. For Wilbur, the poets' calling is to observe and serve nature, both natural and human.

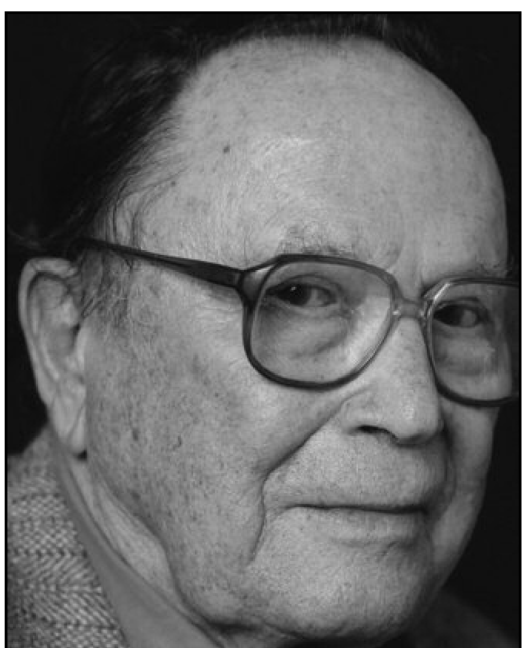


Richard Wilbur

"Love Calls Us…' is a magnificent lyric in blank verse, the title taken from St Augustine's "Confessions" at the point where Augustine is responding to St John, who directs us to "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." Wilbur counters this advice with his love of the physical world. Notice how the opening central conceit of "pulleys" — which serve to assist us in moving heavy loads (both physically and mentally), echoes George Herbert's poem of the same name where "the worlds riches, which dispersed lie, / Contract into a span."

The awakening of "the astounded soul…spirited from sleep," sees the morning laundry on a clothesline moving not because of the wind"but by angels who inhabit the bed-sheets, blouses and smocks with deep joy in "a clear dance" done in the sight of heaven. The juxtaposition between the laundry and angels is truly amazing. The astounded soul then rejoins "the waking body…as the man yawns and rises" from his divine dream of laundry seen as unsoiled souls worn by thieves, lovers and saintly nuns, all trying to achieve the " difficult balance" between this world and the next. In the end the soul returns to the awakened body, calling on the protagonist to:

Bring them down from their ruddy gallows;
Let there be clean linen for the backs of thieves;
Let lovers go fresh and sweet to be undone.
And the heaviest nuns walk in a pure floating
Of dark habits,
keeping their difficult balance.



Richard Wilbur

We readers are invited to join in this "clear dance" of striving in order to to maintain this "difficult balance" between body and soul, between this world and the next, and it is because of this balance that Wilbur's poetry achieves its high level of consistency. As readers we are called upon to reflect on the title of the poem, which serves as a beacon guiding us to as our very *raison d'etre.*

Wilbur's metrical poetry rarely suffers from the more obvious limitations of formalism. Perhaps this is because he can be read in so many ways: as a religious poet, a nature poet, and a gentle, patient lover expressing thankfulness for the gifts of poetry, life and love. His openness to this world permits him to avoid the formal restrictions that lesser poets fall victim to while working in such apparent, rigid, limited circumstances. Wilbur's metaphor for this is that "the strength of the genie comes of his being confined in a bottle." He plays off against the form and overwhelms its formal resistance with the creative imagination.

There is a quiet authority at play in the imaginative fields of this lord. In an earlier time he would have been honoured as a wisdom poet in the manner of David, Solomon or ben Sirach, one searching to unite meditative patterns of meaning culled from the deepest images that unfold from following the heart.

"A Christmas Hymn" concludes his 1961 publication, *Advice to a Prophet and Other Poems.* In the *Collected Poems* these two great poems are one poem apart, separated by "Altitudes," a lyric that urges us to "look up (to) a wild shining of the pure unknown." "Altitudes" ends with a bit of a whimper but this is understandable, given the company it keeps.

The epigraph that opens "A Christmas Hymn" is taken from Luke 19: 39-40, where Jesus condemns the stony hearts and deaf ears of the Pharisees, rebuking them for demanding He silence his joyous disciples. Wilbur's haunting use of the repetitious refrain "And every stone shall cry" – dramatically placed in the centre of each of the four stanzas – reaches its climax in the finale:

But now, as at the ending,
The low is lifted high;
The stars shall bend their voices,
And every stone shall cry.
And every stone shall cry
In praises of the child
By whose descent among us
The worlds are reconciled.

The four stanzas articulate what the stones would say if they could cry out. Wilbur's religious imagery brings light to our secular world, the natural order revealing the divine. The initial stanza, with the earth rejoicing with the heavens, refers to the Nativity, while the paving stones of the second stanza provide the foundation for the entry into Jerusalem. The penultimate stanza portrays the Crucifixion and the stony hearts of men, while the last stanza given above — which complements the opening stanza — illustrates the Ascension where the whole earth cries out. A practicing Episcopalian, Richard Wilbur is at his best as a religious poet. Discerning readers will catch the occasional echo of Hopkins and Stevens but will search in vain for any hint of pious poetry or devotional verse.

The *Collected Poems, 1943-2004* celebrate an extraordinary variety of style and subject. I was so taken with Wilbur's translations of Mallarme, Baudelaire, Dante,

(*continued on page <None>*)

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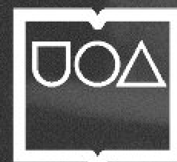

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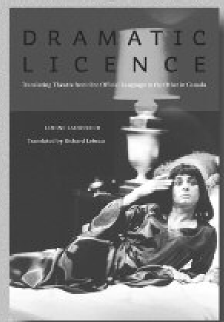

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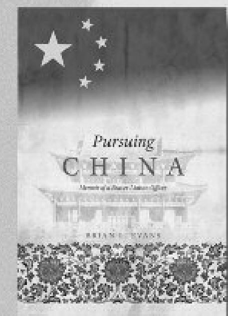

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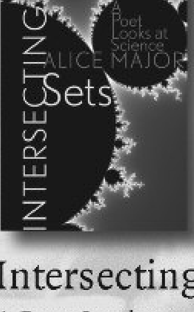

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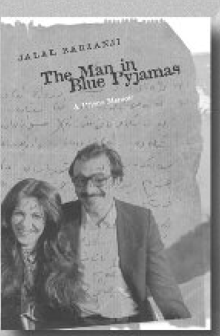

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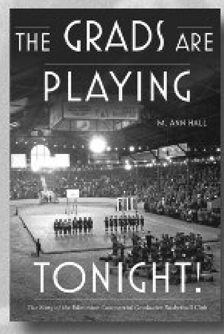

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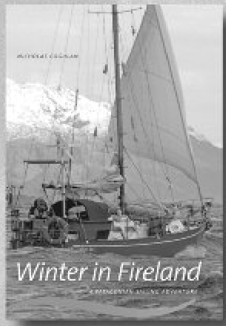

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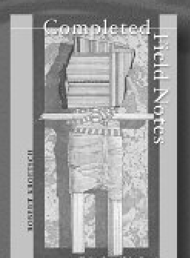

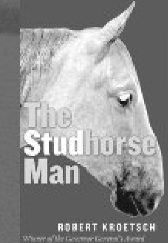

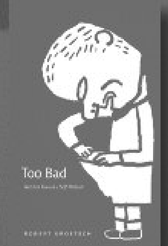

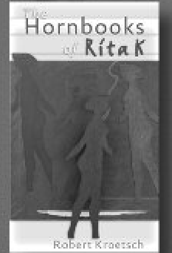

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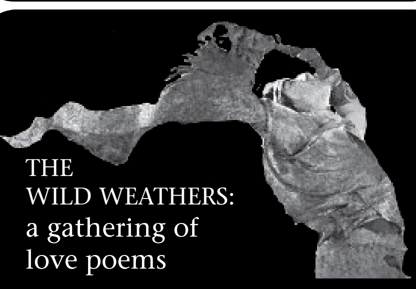

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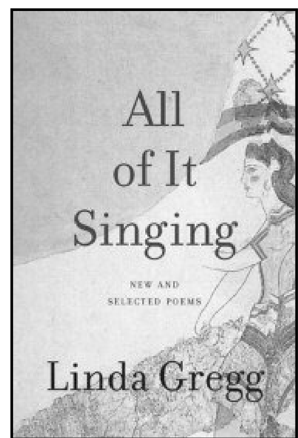
All of It Singing

David Day

There is almost too much to admire in this book. A lifetime of writing: a selection of poems from six fine books, as well as a gathering of new poems. Each poem needs time to take in. Not that the poems are difficult or obscure. In fact, quite the opposite: there is a terrific clarity of thought in all of them. However, they concern themselves with deeply serious matters; such as the intelligence of the heart, or the nature of the soul.



All of It Singing: New and Selected Poems
Linda Gregg
Graywolf Press
paper $18.00

The soul is an emblem so bright
you close your eyes. As when the sun
here comes up out of the sea and blazes
on the white of a village called Lefkes.
The soul is dark in its nature, but shines.
(from Paul on the Road to Damascus)

Gregg has taken seriously the flip side of Socrates dictum that an unexamined life is not worth living. Gregg's poems are concerned with a life carefully observed and examined in a way that bestows grace and beauty on ordinary events; and at times creates a sense of the sacred in aspects of everyday existence. Or, as she herself has phrased it: *"praising the beauty of the ordinary"*

In the poem *Glistening*, in Gregg's simple act of drawing a bucket of water from a well to bathe, she observes *"the water changes from dark to a light/ more silver than the sun."* In its glistening as she pours it over her body she delights in discovering: "*it sparkles easily/ in the sunlight with an earnestness like/ the spirit close up. The water magnifies/ the sun all along the length of it."* In her bathing we have an enactment of pagan baptism that gives "*glistening*" a sacred meaning:

When I return naked to the stone porch,
there is no one to see me glistening.
… I stand there
A long time with the sun and the quiet,
The earth moving slowly as I dry in the light.

The poems suggest a personal philosophy that is a combination of hedonism and stoicism. In *Let Birds,* she speaks of her surrender to passion and proclaims – despite the consequences – *"I will never give up longing."*

In the poem, *It Is The Rising I Love,* Gregg observes *"On the stone back of Ludovici's throne, Venus/ is rising from the water"*. This is an archaic Greek relief sculpture of the birth of the goddess rising from the sea; a scene later famously portrayed by Botticelli. Aspiring to this vision of *"sexual glamour"*, Gregg acknowledges her failure in its achievement, but concludes:

As long as I struggle to float above the ground
and fail, there is a reason for this poetry

Then, in *If Death Wants Me,* we discover Gregg's hedonism giving way to her serious and fearless stoicism. And to her dedication – at any cost – to her profession of poetry.

If death wants me, let it come.
I am here in a room at night on my own.
… I am here with the lights on
writing my last words. If he does not come,
I will still be here doing the same thing."

Gregg has written of her admiration for the Soviet modernist poet, Anna Akhmatova. Upon listening to a recording of Akhmatova reading, Gregg comments on:

The weight and rhythm

Linda Gregg

of her serious voice.
The world of secrecy. Of loss.

One could easily say the same of Gregg's poetry. In fact, this is comparable to what Gerald Stern has written: *"Her subject is loss and separation and the intense search for redemption, which she is able to realize through a profoundly honest and moving language."*

However, as the great French Canadian poet Anne Hebert once stated: *"a poetry of despair is a contradiction in terms."* And as W.S. Merwin wrote, although Gregg's poems are typically concerned with "*the pain of individual loss*", they are none-the-less filled with *"a steady and utterly personal radiance."*

Gregg can be brutally honest about life and love. She does not forget or even forgive what was done to her; or what she has done – but without judgement amorally accepts all as part of her life.

Love came along and said, "I know,
I know. Abandoned after all
those promises.
But I can't help. I traffic
in desire, passion, and lust.
Trade bread for more bread,
change blood into wine.
I take the heaviest things
And make them joyous."
(from *The Limits of Desire)*

In an early poem, *Summer in a Small Town,* from her first book *Too Bright To See*, published in 1981, she seems to celebrate the end of affairs; and even finds strength in events that might emotionally devastate others.

When men leave me
they leave me in a beautiful place.
It is always late summer.
When I think of them now,
I think of the place.
And being happy alone afterwards

But of course, she does not always find herself "in a beautiful place". Chicago, for instance: "… a terrible ruined place/ with streets made desolate by neon,/ in midwinter and freezing winds". There the end of one such affair is starkly encapsulated in the three line poem, '*They Tell Me It's Over.*

I say, "I stayed in Motel 6, where you told me
to stay." He says, "I meant The Chicago Inn."
That was this winter's visit. That was a year.

Yet when she reflects on these past relationships, there is very little bitterness or any deep sense of being a victim. This is perhaps because she is capable of being equally honest about how, she has hurt others. In the poem, *I Thought On His Desire For Three Days,* Gregg pulls no punches, as the poem ends with:

… When the wife
called and said I was a whore, I was quiet,
but inside I said, "perhaps". It has been raining
all night. Summer rain. The liveliness of it keeps
me awake. I am so happy to have lived.

In *The Clapping,* an elegiac poem about the memory of a time and a place and a lover now gone, Gregg salvages what moments of joy one can from the wreckage of a love affair. The words and images come rhythmically and episodically as true memories do: one image and breathless phrase after the other – building up a scenario a portrait of a time and place that is both specific and universal – saying yes it was like that and yes again – and each phrase qualifying and refining – erotic and ordinary observations combined.

… light mixed with snow, sun on glass. And the heart
never tired, the passion never lessened. Eyes open
and mouth closed, mouth open and eyes closed.
… that boatload
of people all clapping as you embrace me on shore.
Which shore? Was there an earth? There was,
there was.

It is not difficult to imagine why the American Academy of Poets judged this book to be the winner of the prestigious Lenore Marshall Prize for the most outstanding book of poems of the year published in America. Nor why she is also the recipient of the PEN/Voelcher Award in Poetry for career achievement, the Poetry Society of America's William Carlos Williams Award and the $50,000 Poets and Writers Inc. Jackson Poetry Prize.

In *Being Eleven,* Gregg speaks of "*The innerness that cannot be shared/ except for poetry.*" It is in this *"innerness"* that her poetry is most revealing; but she also writes movingly about the ultimately unknowable *"innerness"* of others – and of other creatures. In the poem *The Weight* she describes this *"innerness"* and *"dignity of being"* in a pair of horses who for years shared a paddock.

There are things they did that I did not know
The privacy of them had a river in it...
This was finally their freedom.
The freedom an oak tree knows.
That is built at night by stars.

In this poetry of *"innerness"* Gregg reveals someone who has come to love her own loneliness – or perhaps more precisely, to embrace the "aloneness" that ultimately defines her – or anyone. This is starkly apparent in such poems as *Always Alone,* or *It Goes Away* which begins *"I give everything away and it goes away"* and ends with "*Everything I have I give away/ and it goes away.*"

It is an acceptance of the eventual loss in life of everything. That eventually lovers, friends, relatives all abandon one, or die. Or we abandon them, and eventually die as well. This is simply a brave recognition that we all ultimately must die alone. And in these poems, Gregg refuses to take comfort in the delusion that we are not alone.

However, Gregg's philosophy does not in any sense require the wearing of a hair shirt. Gregg joyfully embraces her chosen life, and in *Staying After* admits to a few of the many selfish pleasures of that life.

Women have houses now, and children.
I live alone in a kind of luxury.
I wake when I feel like it,
read what Rilke wrote to Tsvetaeva.
At night I watch the apartments
whose windows are still lit
after midnight. I fell in love.

Linda Gregg

I believed people. And even now
I love the yellow light shining
Down on the dirty brick wall.

As a poet, it is in the accumulation and shaping of memories that Gregg discovers the finest of pleasures. Her poems are filled with the wonderful *"fragments of stories"* she speaks of in *The Lightning*, and of *"Dreaming her own story/ and wanting to be part of it."*

Mnemosyne the Goddess of Memory is, after all, the mother of the Muses, and in her poem *Winning* Gregg brings this to mind and presents us with her *Ars Poetica.*

There is having by having
and having by remembering.
All of it a glory, but what is past
is the treasure. What remains.
… Poems of time
now and time then, each
containing the other carefully.

Linda Gregg's *New and Selected Poems* is a book of time now and time then. All of it a glory and a treasure. *All Of It Singing.*

David Day has published over 40 books of poetry, ecology, history, fantasy, mythology and fiction. Born in 1947 in Victoria, BC, he now lives in Toronto, Ontario. His latest book is Nevermore ***(Quatro Press).***

WILBUR (*continued from page <None>*)

Brodsky, Voznesensky, Borges, Akhmatova, de Nerval, Moliere, and the wonderful purity of Francis Jammes' "A Prayer to Go to Paradise with the Donkeys," with its Frostian tone. In Wilbur's soft hands these become poems closer to Lowell's "Imitations" in their re-creation, than any literal translations.

What other wonders await the inquisitive reader? Two appendicies. One is a short grouping of "Show Lyrics" for Leonard Bernstein's "Candide" and for a play by Giraudoux. But it is the 100 pages of "Poems for Children and Others" that is a tiny treasure of delight, particularly "The Disappearing Alphabet" and "The Pig in the Sprigot." In the former, the first line offers up the proposition: "If the alphabet began to disappear…" and the following 26 stanzas proceed to do just that, eliminating one letter at a time and considering the consequences by looking at various words. It is clever, witty, and an imaginative delight for readers of all ages, in the manner of Roethke's wonderful sequence "I Am! Says the Lamb."

The last poem in the book, "The Pig in the Spigot," plays with words found within words and the imaginative, witty discoveries revealed by such invented word-games. The sequence provides an appropriate end to the *Collected Poems, 1943-2004*: "Now that you've read this *book*, I hope you'll say/ That what you found inside of *book* is *boo,* / But don 't say that ! I'll hate it if you do,).

Doug Beardsley is the author of eleven volumes of poetry. He studied at Sir George Williams University where he came under the poetic tutelage of Irving Layton, with whom he corresponded until Layton's death in 2006. He lives in Victoria.

Afflictions & Departures

Judith Grey

Afflictions & Departures
Madeline Sonik
Anvil Press
184 pages, $20

This gathering of experiences shakes, and deepens, my sense of the world, its ironies and its sacredness. Madeline Sonik's latest book provides pleasure, information and facts new to me, and elicits feelings and sensations, moving me outside of myself.

From the author's conception during her parents' voyage on the Queen Mary in 1959, crossing the Atlantic from England to the United States, through her late teenage years, we receive a series of pictures of her moving through the world; her personal world as well as the zeitgeist, the spirit of the times. Her writing evokes a different kind of imagery for me; very sharply etched outlines sometimes filled in with muted colors.

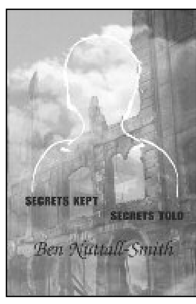
Throughout the book, we are reminded of the poignant ignorance and innocence of childhood, not knowing the meanings of some words, nor suspecting negative actions of those closest to us. But we recognize in her narratives that a child can naturally be bodywise and follow inner messages, despite a lack of experience. We follow her through the interface of inner and outer; between the author and her world as it is being created.

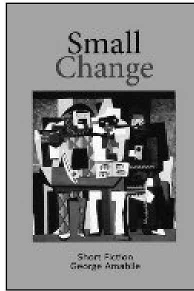
Many of her afflictions attacked her breathing, or her life spirit. Her mother smoked throughout her pregnancy. Her parents both smoked heavily, creating a polluted home atmosphere, compounded by alcoholism, depression, and compulsiveness on their parts. The chapter on the environmental disaster at the Love Canal, and her descriptions of the effects of chemical residue in the air and ground around Niagara Falls is a brave, in-depth scrutiny of people's carelessness, greed, and apathy. As a young child, she developed croup several times a year, serving to separate the family at holiday times, to her mother's great relief. In 1975 she traveled to Toronto to "get away from this suffocation." As a child of her times she herself experimented with smoking. She spent five years cleaning toilets to support herself, using a toxic cleanser, inhaling its fumes. At the same time she spent every spare minute in her drafty upstairs apartment writing with a manual typewriter.

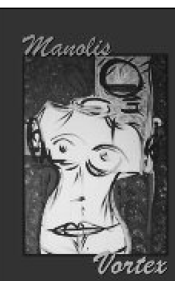
Madeline Sonik

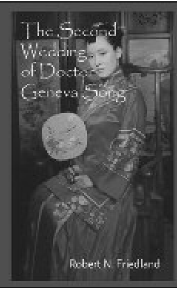
In the final essay, she is diagnosed with tuberculosis, from which she does recover. She says, 'It would be years before I'd learn, of all the famous writers who'd succumbed to tuberculosis. Writers such as Anton Chekhov, Anne and Emily Bronte, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Franz Kafka, John Keats, George Orwell, and Robert Louis Stevenson. Writers… who'd sat day after day, toiling in the filth and dust of humanity.' Yet, Ms. Sonik taps into her strengths to survive, demonstrating to us all our ability to endure and grow from adversity.

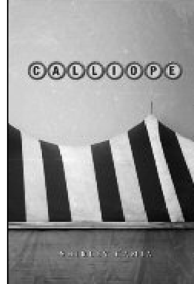
Judith Grey farmed and then ranched in BC's Cariboo country before moving to Victoria and completing a BA in psychology. She writes in the lulls between hypnotherapy and counselling clients.

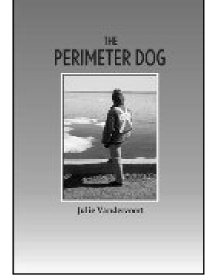


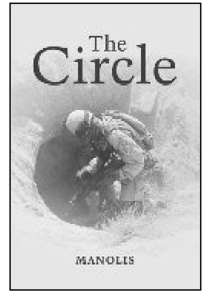












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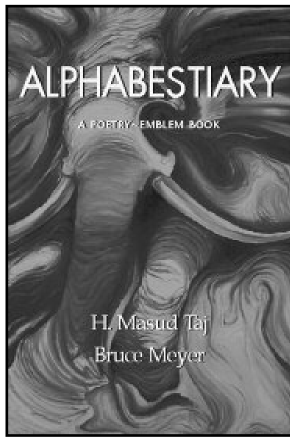
Alphabestiary

Linda Rogers



Alphabestiary, a poetry emblem book
H. Masud Taj
& Bruce Meyer
Exile Editions
2011, 93 pages, paper

Our ancestors went into the ark two by two, but never in the history of the world has it been so important to live the connection between man and beast, world and weather.

Flood and famine, it is all Biblical, but there is a germ of truth in every apocryphal story. Mutual respect and cooperation, the fluidity of being as we move from one incarnation to the next, is what we have to contradict the cosmic arguments, hurricane and drought, that, failing the doctrine of One, we no longer deserve to occupy the real estate we call Earth.

Alphabestiary, starting at the beginning, as we know it, is the narrative of a common intelligence moving between species. Every literate child remembers one book and that book is primal – animals standing for letters, the alphabetical foundation of communication and learning.

This book is an intelligent, somewhat ironic, alphabet for children of all ages, the poems written by the poet, calligrapher and architect H. Masud Taj and complementary prose commentary by the poet and Professor Bruce Meyer, who rains esoteric details on its absorbant pages.

This bemused bestiary is a book perfumed with the essence of animal and man, side by side in the hold of a rocking boat, their spirits colliding in every wave. Just as calligraphy meets common sense on the page, so do the voices of man and animal find their own harmonies, something we might have learned from our First Nations had we listened.

We always look first at the hard letters to see what the alphabeteer makes of a shape like X, the crossroads where Faust and bluesman Robert Johnson met the devil and made their deals. Y is always Yak and Z is Zebra but what about X? These collaborators have found Xolo. Xolo is by coincidence a dog, man's best friend, the metaphor for felicity and domestic harmony; what synchronicity in a book that seeks the common thread. Dog, Meyer reminds us, like any palindromist worth his ink, is God backwards. The Dominicans were god's dogs, parse the word and you will see domination and dogmatism, necessary conditions for ecclesiastical obedience.

"Maybe there is hope for us yet, " he reminds us. "Everyone, sit!"

Alphabestiary is a book of parables, so much wisdom is held in its joined hands. Taj says of the parrot:

> *To be civilized is to be subtle.*
> *To speak between the lines,*
> *To curse in seductive ways.*

and one mother is forced to remember three angel-faced choirboys, innocent in short pants, teaching a parrot at a public zoo to say "fuck!"

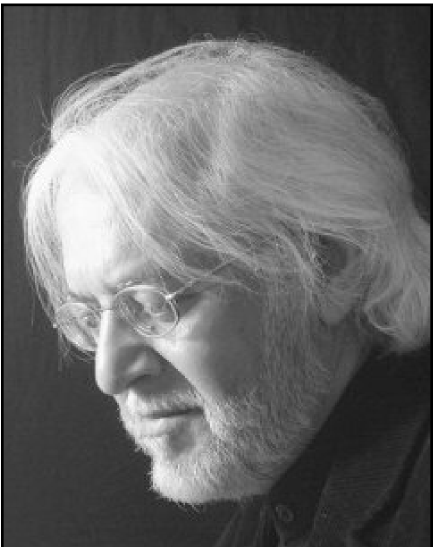
There are lessons for all of us in this book, where alphabet opens to reveal the meaning of life, philosophy for dummies.St. Anselm and Bishop Berkeley would be pleased with the Lion's question:

> *What would you be*
> *Without my glance?*

As if – in this hungry epoch of social media – prose, poetry and a sprinkling of line drawings was not enough, there are video links and URLs for the curious who will find out more about a friendship and the East and West hemispheric process that brought this delightful book together. Animals, illustrated and imagined, appear and disappear like the Cheshire cat's smile, but mostly they leave invisible paw and claw prints all over our sleep as they nudge us to a greater awakening, passing on, like the kangaroo,

> *The pleasures of front-packing*
> *The passion for dispossession*
> *The destiny of infinite regress.*

Linda Rogers was born in the year of the monkey.



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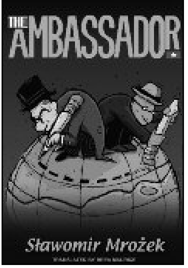

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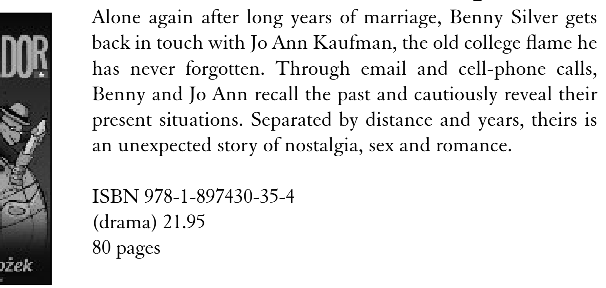

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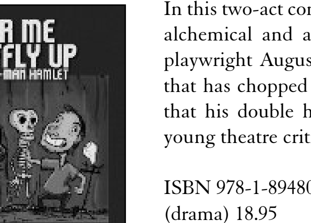

Charles Tidler – The Butcher's Apron

In this two-act comedy dream play, Charles Tidler presents an alchemical and absurdist portrait of the visionary Swedish playwright August Stringberg, who pursues a doppleganger that has chopped out his heart to Berlin, where he discovers that his double has fallen head-over-heels in love with the young theatre critic and feminist, Frida Uhl.

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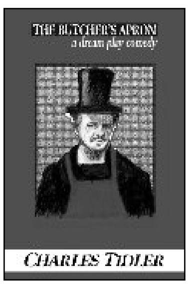
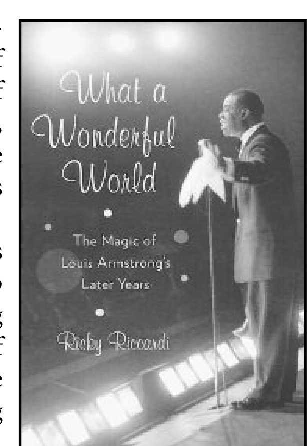


Summer Jazz Notes

Joseph Blake

Ricky Riccardi's *What a Wonderful World* is a well-researched, vivid account of the last 25 years of jazz star, Louis Armstrong's life. This period of the musician's career is often dismissed by jazz purists, but as Riccardi's biography passionately recounts, the late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s witnessed many of the highpoints of Armstrong's long, stellar career.

"In many ways, these were the most important years of Armstrong's life," Riccardi writes. "With a bruised lip and an almost inhuman, punishing schedule, Armstrong worked harder than ever before to attain a new height of popularity, staying relevant and in demand at an age when most performers start to fade. With each passing year, the popularity of jazz in America diminished while, simultaneously, the popularity of Louis Armstrong around the world only grew. Because many jazz critics can't embrace popular acts—and because new is often equated with 'better'—a lot of Armstrong's most lasting work of these years was repudiated."



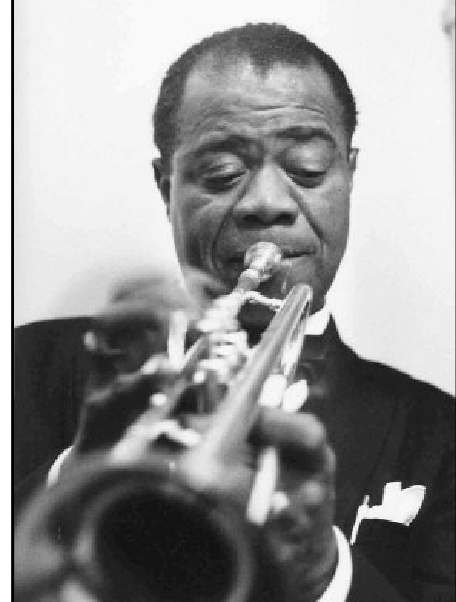
What a Wonderful World: The Magic of Louis Armstrong's Later Years,
Ricky Riccardi
Pantheon Books
369 pages, $33

When I visited the Louis Armstrong House Museum in Queens, New York last year, (where Riccardi is Project Archivist, a position that gives him access to Armstrong's unpublished documents and recordings of interviews and performances), I learned that the veteran musician was on the road for more than 200 nights/year during this era touring North America, Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe, including behind the Iron Curtain. 40,000 fans delayed his plane's landing in Stockholm. 70,000 turned out for his band's outdoor performance in Ghana. More than 100,000 cheered Armstrong in Budapest, and his recording of *Hello Dolly* topped the charts at the height of Beatlemania in 1963. As Riccardi writes, "he was arguably the most recognizable entertainer on the planet."

The biographer also makes a case for Armstrong's artistry during his later years, calling 1954s *Louis Armstrong Plays W.C. Handy* "the greatest album Armstrong ever recorded"

Equally acclaimed are the musician's late-season collaborations with Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, Oscar Peterson, and Dave Brubeck. As Armstrong himself stated in 1956, "I'm playing better now than I've ever played in my life."

Riccardi tackles criticism of Armstrong's clowning and vaudeville antics by citing the musician's attack on President Eisenhower during 1957s Little Rock school desegregation as "two-faced" and having "no guts."



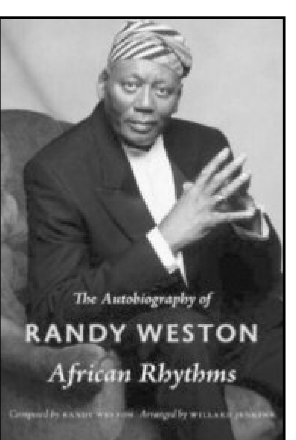
Louis Armstrong

Perhaps even more striking was Armstrong's refusal to play in his beloved New Orleans hometown until it would receive him "without racial distinction." After the 1965 Selma, Alabama bombing, Armstrong performed a version of the protest song *Black and Blue* that Riccardi describes as speaking thorough his music.

"Armstrong stoically played a full chorus of melody, pacing himself dramatically… He now assumed the air of a preacher, pointing a finger skyward. The tension exploded when he began his final eight bars with a three-note phrase leading to a screaming high concert B, not the highest note he had ever hit, but arguably the angriest…Here was dangerous intensity personified."

This book helps complete our understanding of a musical genius by painting a more nuanced portrait of a wonderful, warm and loving entertainer with strong opinions and high ideals.

Jazz pianist, composer and bandleader, Randy Weston's autobiography, *African Rhythms* depicts the musician's long and illustrious career as a cross-cultural ambassador. Now 86 and back in his Brooklyn birthplace after decades living in Africa, Weston tells his story of exploring the connection between jazz and African sources with wisdom and humility. Music journalist Willard Jenkins is credited as "the arranger" of *African Rhythms* (Weston is credited as "the composer"), and the book's story-by-transcript form punctuates hours of Weston's conversational interviews with anecdotes from various figures in the musician's life and admirer's letters to produce an engaging narrative peopled with a range of voices including Langston Hughes, Paul Bowles, Charlie Parker, Muhammad Ali, and Duke Ellington.

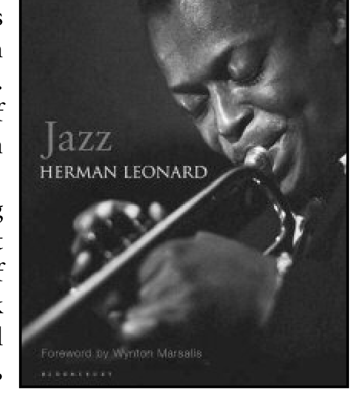


African Rhythms
Randy Weston
Duke University Press
352 pages, $32.95

New York Times jazz critic, Peter Watrous calls Weston "the true heir to both Thelonious Monk and Duke Ellington," while fellow critic Stanley Crouch calls his music "the result of a studious and inspired intelligence…an intelligence that is a fresh synthesis of African elements with jazz technique."

Weston recounts the cultural pride his Caribbean-born father instilled in him and his mother's Deep-South church influences. Music-loving Brooklyn neighbors Max Roach, Duke Jordan and Ray Abrams joined young Weston in his pursuit of jazz mastery, while later, state-sponsored jazz tours of Africa led to years living in Tangiers and immersion in African culture. Weston has spent his professional life spreading African music throughout the world and establishing his roots as an African American artist. His autobiography describes that quest with hard-won wisdom and deep spirituality.

Herman Leonard was one of jazz music's greatest chroniclers. *Jazz* is a beautiful collection of Leonard's luminous black and white portraits of musicians with an insightful foreword by Wynton Marsalis. Leonard's photographs capture the sound and soul of jazz. He was a jazz musician with a camera for an instrument.



Serving in the U.S. Army in Burma during World War II, Leonard developed film in his combat helmet late at night. After apprenticing with Yousuf Karsh in Ottawa after the war, he moved to New York where his passion for jazz led him to the seminal bebop sessions and friendships with Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie and other jazz greats.

Jazz
Herman Leonard
Bloomsbury
303 pages, $65

Leonard's shot-on-the-run, spare style and meticulously printed images, (he soaked his film in mercury to enhance its speed in low light), give his photos of live performance a striking, powerful intimacy. The highly-stylized, smoky portraits are further enhanced by backlighting that produces a moonlight-like quality. You can almost hear bebop jazz emerging from the silvery shadows.

Leonard made his living as a commercial photographer, shooting nudes for *Playboy* and fashion models for *Elle and Marie Claire.* He was also Marlon Brando's personal photographer in the Far East, but only occasionally sold one of his jazz photos to *Down Beat* for $10.

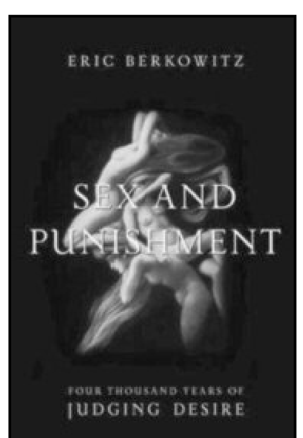
He moved to New Orleans in the late 1980s, and Hurricane Katrina's flooding in 2005 destroyed more that 8,000 of his jazz prints. Luckily, his negatives had been moved to a vault on a high floor of the city's Ogden Museum. The 300 dramatic images in this book were drawn from those negatives. Sadly, Leonard died in 2010 before this great collection was published. With the publication of *Jazz* his great life work lives on.

Joseph Blake is Music Editor for PRRB. He lives in Vi ctoria, B.C.

Eros, Builder of Cities

Richard Wirick

As my favorite social historian, Fred Schneider of the B-52s, likes to say, there are three basic urges: hunger, shelter, and 'getting some.' Take the latter of this triad as your basic ingredient. Start with pre-Christian societies and civilization's strong discontent with the non-procreative erotic. Add layer after layer of aromatic, perfectly-spiced anecdotes about lust-driven schemers and their ultimate, illustrative and usually quite terrible fates. Baste slowly in a shimmering prose style that will be envied by the best essayists. Voilà. Bon Appetit. Serve hot. Large portions.



Sex & Punishment: Four Thousand Years of Judging Desire
Eric Berkowitz
Counterpoint
443 pages

It is the mark of an excellent new writer to take a heavily treated subject and approach it with new energy and direction. Eric Berkowitz has done this with *Sex and Punishment: Four Thousand Years of Judging Desire.* He takes us through several millennia of sexual stasis and deviation with marvelous velocity, grace and precision. He instructs and delights, and within these Aristotelian parameters he harnesses (and preserves!) the lurid verve of the Hefners, the Jongs, and the lugubrious Frank Harris of *My Secret Life.* [Full disclosure: Eric was a law partner of mine some years back and while I would like to tell him to keep his day job and give up scrivening, I cannot, for reasons that follow.]

Where else to start but with the Greeks? In small, gossipy Athens, where a man's reputation was always up for review, adultery laws were face-savers far more than guides for behavior. No sex act was intrinsically prohibited for, as Plato said, the various acts follow any act's gradient of quality. "A love affair itself is neither right nor wrong," he said in the *Meno,* "but right when it is conducted rightly and wrong when it is conducted wrongly." Sex was often, for young men, exchanged for an elder's tutelage, and in Greece's homoerotic hothouse, a boy submitting too easily to his tutor was seen as female or bestial; if he resisted too much he stood to lose the older man's pedagogy and sponsorship. Laws fell into place around this social arrangement; to transgress was simply to throw off its equilibrium.

Discussions of Rome's imperial bedrooms follow, but Berkowitz is most interesting when exploring ages whose sexual history has been given short shrift, as in the Middle. In many ways the *moyen age* was utterly practical, with (especially) Mediterranean societies deeming prostitution "absolutely indispensable to the world" and taking the opportunity to tax it heavily. But money was never the key component of harlotery under the law. A strumpet could merely be a woman who had been available to "a number of men," the magic number of five somehow sufficing. In the monastic countryside, nun-prostitutes were required to remit fees to their convents, or keep their proceeds to give later to chosen pious causes. Clerics and not constables were the sexual police of the age. Laws prohibiting certain acts almost always had a racist or ethnic cleansing component: homosexuality and bestiality were invariably perceived as forces of either Islam or Judaism. Each were conduits to hell, their practicioners vividly pictured as agents of Satan, horned and bearded and chained and tailed.

The book moves through the early modern period, with Charles II not daring to institute a code that would curtain his debaucheries. The Protestant Reformation contained elements of rebellion against priestly lechery, institutionalized molestation, the tincture of the Papacy in the pure, clear vessel. By the time of de Sade and the Bastille, sexual freedom joined the battle against monarchy and theocratic nationalism, its leader a prophet of deviance who spent his prison hours carving wood phalluses and widening himself nightly by riding "the sweet Fafnir.'

The Renaissance is treated mainly through a British prism, with its societal sanctions of sex ridiculed by geniuses like Shakespeare, Jonson, and others whose condemnation of society's retribution became accepted, if not revered. *Measure for Measure, The Winter's Tale* and other works served to highlight the hypocrisy of sexual bans more effectively than tracts of essayists or the proclamations of the Roundheads. Oddly, artists like Milton, whose 'Defense of Divorce' is an anti-Papist masterpiece and has been relied upon by modern feminist writers like Margaret Talbot, nonetheless succumbed to the sexual curdle of fellow Puritans, at least when called in to vote with them on policy positions.

Eric Berkowitz

The fine polish, that powdered wig perfection of the Augustans of course masked a lust that no law could get ahold of. Samuel Pepys's libido was especially powerful, and the legal apparatus of his time seemed more concentrated on sedition than prohibiting the upstairs-downstairs groping and buggery that can be read between the lines of his masterful *Diary.* The chambermaids who combed lice out of his hair and helped him dress could expect his hands to travel up their legs as they worked, and he had a penchant for being masturbated by a maid in stagecoaches on the way to Parlaimentary debates (no doubt on vice laws). Bestiality was especially rampant in the England of the time, and when a Scot, David Malcolm, was caught copulating with an animal, he fell to his knees and begged for mercy by explaining how many times he had theretofore tried it without success, and wished to be allowed his hard earned consummation. Bestiality was almost always associated with witchcraft, and while these practicioners were at it, they were most catholic in their taste: cows, goats and deer were favorites, but other unwilling sexual receptacles included boar, foxes, and "large hares." The punishment often involved burning at the stake rather than hanging, as the earth was deemed necessary of clearance of a pervert's flesh.

By the time of American slavery, of course, sexual crimes broke down rigidly along racial lines. The Southern states mandated castration for black men who even attempted to woo the kin of their white masters, though simple execution was the more common punishment. The hammer came down hard during Reconstruction. "After the Civil War," Berkowitz writes, ""[R]acial tensions . . . .reached their apex, and a man's dark skin was proof enough that he was a rapist; juries were instructed to infer that any sexual encounter between a black man and a white woman involved intent on his part to commit rape. Between 1700 and 1820, more than 80 per cent of the men executed in the U.S. for rape were of African descent, and 95 percent of females in these cases were white.

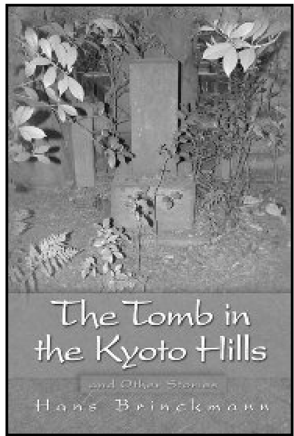
For a writer, including Berkowitz himself, the most fascinating chapters turn on sanctions of pornography, or literature than was mistakenly pushed under that rubric by particularly conservative British, French and American administrations. *Fanny Hill,* stories by de Maupassant and Zola and Flaubert, and of course D.H. Lawrence were the focus of authorities, driven by the belief that such writing should be more aggressively prosecuted than sex itself, as the former gave rise to the latter through "lustful incitement, deleterious and langorous preoccupation." Control what goes out in brown paper wrappers and you've won half the battle for the potential reader's heart. The postal systems were crawling with censors and seizers and name-takers. Law courts invoked a kind of strict liability that put in the dock writer, publisher, distributor, and the reader lucky enough for the prior three to have beaten the odds. The *Chatterly* ban was the broadest and most effective, some believe because the book involved heterosexual buggery, something the British bench found particularly unnerving.

Berkowitz's book is a wonderland of the forbidden, and of society's attempt to keep it so, despite all odds and its being predictably destined to ultimate failure. It is a mural sometimes done as miniature, sometimes as epic, but always with a craftsman's hand—a sprawling story told with uncommon precision and purity of expression. In past ages, the bluenoses would have Berkowitz himself belonging in prison. But his book belongs in your hands and on the shelf of any reader interested in, as Lord Rochester said, "[O]ur long and fruitless bridling of lust."

Richard Wirick is the author of the novel* One Hundred Siberian Postcards *(Telegraph Books). He has been published in* Paris Review *and* The Nation. *He practices law in Los Angeles. See his revies elsewhere in this issue.

The Tomb in the Kyoto Hills

Hillel Wright



The Tomb in the Kyoto Hills and Other Stories
Hans Brinckmann
Strategic Book Publishing
2011. 150 p. $12.95

Hans Brinckmann was born in The Hague, Netherlands in 1932, which makes him 80 years old this year. Having met the author several times in his adopted home of Tokyo, I find it hard to believe he's much over 60.

Brinckmann has had the advantage of several decades of experience in several countries and in more than one career, He began his first career, after a brief stint in Singapore, in 1950 for a Dutch bank in Japan, where he lived and worked for 24 years. He went on to work as a banker in London, Curacao, Amsterdam and New York City, but in 1988 he retired from banking and began to write, in Amsterdam, London, Sydney (Australia) and finally back in Japan.

Since 2005 he has authored a memoir, *The Magatama Doodle*; a history of post-war Japan, *Showa Japan*; a volume of poetry, *The Undying Day*; and two collections of short stories, *Noon Elusive* (2006) and now *The Tomb in the Kyoto Hills*.

It's hard to resist making comparisons between Noon Elusive and this new collectionthe two collections, especially because one story, "Twice Upon a Plum Tree", appears in both books.

The most obvious difference is that while *Noon Elusive* globe hops to London, Paris, the Balkans, Japan and New York, *The Tomb in the Kyoto Hills* remains, for the most part, in Japan. The other difference is that three of the four new stories are darker and edgier than the six stories which make up the earlier collection.

The most significant similarity between the two books is the predominant theme, which is the ambiguity of choices people make in search of a moral imperative.

The first story, "A Leap into the Light", presents the dilemma of a young expatriate living in Osaka, circa 1968 who is somehow chosen by an older, reclusive and somewhat mysterious business associate as confidante to the latter's rather questionable sexual activity.

In "Kyoto Bus Stop", a chance encounter on a city street brings together a pair of ex-patriates, an unnamed European traveller and a young French woman, apparently "owned" by a Yakuza-connected boyfriend, leading to choices both morally ambiguous and physically dangerous.

Hans Brinckman

"Pets in Marriage", which might be taken as the collection's "comic relief", veers away from the dark side and gives us an essentially good-natured tale of marital stress and power struggles which begins: "Yuka liked dogs. Isamu liked cats."

The twice told tale "Twice Upon a Plum Tree" gives us a determinably unsentimental look at a potentially emotional situation, in which a senior Dutch diplomat, recently assigned to his country's embassy in Tokyo, is contacted by the Japanese woman who, 30 years earlier, had first captured and later broke his heart.

While these first four stories make up 64 pages, the title story, "The Tomb in the Kyoto Hills", covers 82, qualifying it as a novella, rather than a short story. In fact, this narrative echoes a much shorter story in *Noon Elusive* called "Way Out Blues", in which a successful British undertaker abandons his business and joins a New Age cult. In "The Tomb in the Kyoto Hills" a high-powered and influential Chicago corporate litigator makes the shocking decision to give up his lucrative law practice and to re-locate with his wife and school-age daughter to Kyoto, where he has never been, to pursue a new career as a *sumi-e* (Japanese ink brush) painter.

While this story is rife with moral and ethical dilemmas which must somehow be resolved, the introduction of an extra-marital love triangle – perhaps as an attempt to lengthen the story and inject more spice – strikes this reviewer as the one serious weakness in the book, as the attraction between the lawyer and the woman journalist – his wife's best friend – is not charged with enough raw sexual magnetism to make the feelings described, rather than illustrated, by the author, believable.

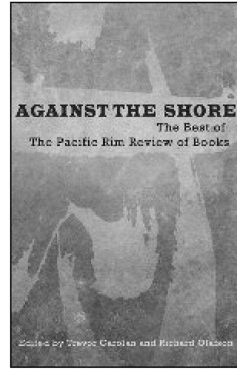
Perhaps, despite his strong beginning as a sensualist a la Kawabata and Tanizaki in the earlier stories, Brinckmann reverts to being too much of a gentleman at the end.

Hillel Wright is a frequent contributor to PRRB. He writes from Japan.

Against the Shore
The Best of PRRB

Along the Rim
The Best of PRRB, Volume 2

edited by **Trevor Carolan & Richard Olafson**



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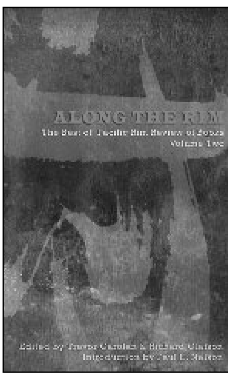

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From its inception in 2005, *The Pacific Rim Review of Books* has cast a close, constructive eye on contemporary literature. With the publication of these anthologies, the *PRRB* now confirms its place in contemporary Canadian arts & letters. Addressing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

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

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

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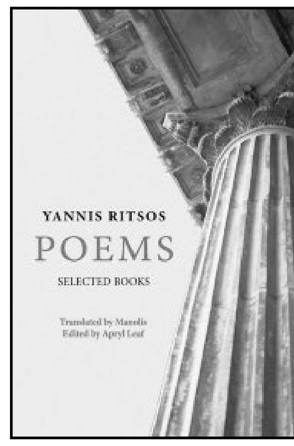
Yanis Ritsos

Amy Henry

...in life his muse gave tongues to sky water stone mortality
...he dreamed of freedom, grace, drawing upon the well he'd made, guarding the source of stubborn faith to seek coherence in the blind mess others called reality.

From the poem "Monemvasia (In Memory of Yannis Ritsos)" by Jena Woodhouse



Yannis Ritsos Poems
Translated by Manolis
Edited by Apryl Leaf
LibrosLibertad

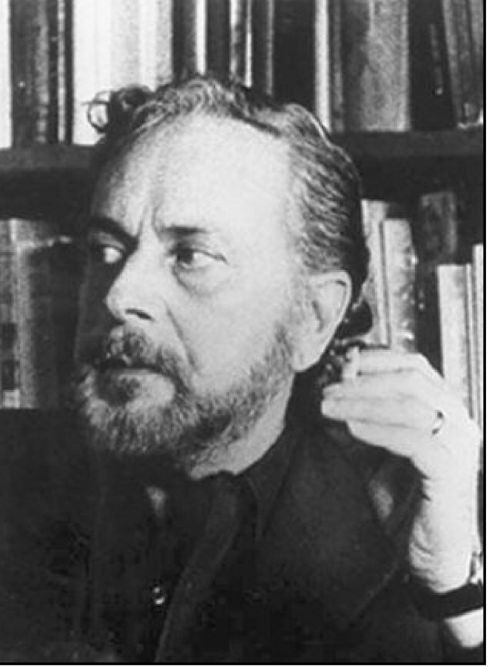
Yannis Ritsos' prolific body of poetry made him one of Greece's most beloved sons, although the scale of his work is nearly surpassed by the suffering he endured. Born in Monemvasia, Greece in 1909, his life was filled with family tragedy, personal illness, political persecution, and years of incarceration. Yet no amount of personal pity infuses his poetry; instead, his love for his homeland is what filled his heart, and from there, to his writing. As Dale Jacobson stated in the *Great River Review*, "In Ritsos, I found collective grief for the tragedies of history, and especially for social, not only individual, injustice." Jacobsen noted that Ritsos' encompassing humanity was a style especially unique and not often found in American poetry. Rather, "an intolerance toward a collective feeling" was more typical, with famous American poets focusing on "individual complaint" (Jacobson 26). Because of the political upheavals that touched nearly every Greek citizen in the twentieth century, he was able to speak for them: "Ritsos was able to create a poetry that argued we have survived only because...a solidarity remains among those without power, who have recognized loss and taken the next necessary step anyway" (Jacobson 28). Throughout his many works, his voice of shared feeling is always present, yet surprisingly empty of bitterness.

Ritsos was incarcerated numerous times in different prison camps by authorities determined to stop his writing that was so loved by his nation as well as other poets worldwide. By stealth and careful actions, he was able to keep many of his collected poems intact throughout various relocations. With his release, one pressured both by his need for medical treatment and the harsh cries for mercy by noted poets such as Pablo Neruda, Pablo Picasso, and Louis Aragon in 1952, he was able to bring these hidden works to light. Despite his joy at freedom, he didn't settle in and lay low. He remained active in politics as a Communist and continued writing as well as travelling throughout Europe (namely the Balkans and Russia), and throughout the 1960s his work was receiving wide acclaim, eventually being nominated for the Nobel Prize. (Bein)

What was it about Ritsos that so connected him with the people of Greece, and stirred such opposition from varying authorities? Likely it is because he was so vocal about injustice on all scales, at a time when silence on his part would have afforded him more freedom. For example, after being hospitalized in Crete, he wrote several newspaper articles exposing the deplorable conditions of the sanitorium, which eventually led to the patients being relocated. At another time in 1936, he wrote about the massacre of tobacco workers by police in Thesallonika , which led to that collection, *Epitaphios*, being banned.

Intriguingly, a new development regarding Epitaphios that had even stranger implications occurred in 1958. The composer Mikis Theodorakis had read Ritsos' collection *Epitaphios* and was deeply moved. He had actually met Yannis Ritsos previously when both had been imprisoned on Makronissos. Later, both men moved on in life with Theodorakis studying music in France and Ritsos continuing to write. Conflict occurred when another composer, Manos Hadjidakis, had set *Ephitaphios* to music. Immediately, "an unhappy Theodorakis promptly returned home, started his own orchestra, and with Grigoris Bithikotsis as soloist produced a recording of *Epitaphios* based on the popular rembetiko." From this point, a competition was created between the two composers, and Greece's music lovers heatedly debated which version was preferred. Eventually, Theodorakis' version became more famous, and Epitaphios became known as the music of revolt and protest (Comerford 9). Incidentally, his score for Zorba the Greek cemented his legacy in Greek history, and Theodorakis was also nominated for a Nobel Prize.

Ritsos eventually ended up imprisoned again in 1967, and those who either recited or sang his verses faced arrest as well. As before, the literary world took note and made an issue of his imprisonment, which ended when the leaders of the coup under Papadopoulos were detained. Again, rather than simply caving to the political coup of the time, he maintained his alliance with resistance efforts at great personal cost.

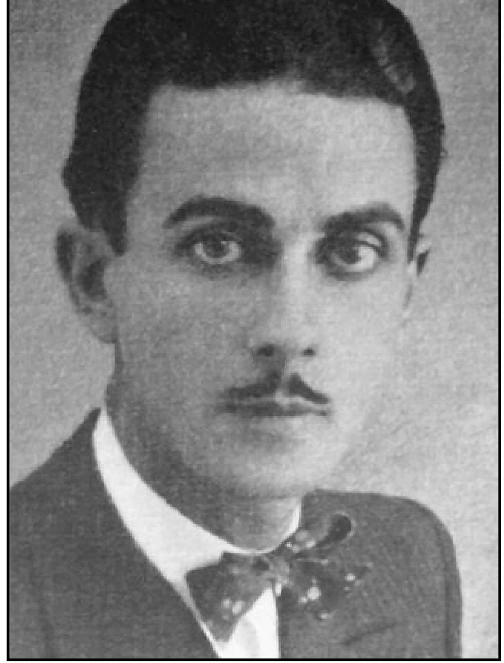


Yiannis Ritsos

One poet, Minas Savvas, had the opportunity to interview Ritsos in 1975 at a time when he was enjoying freedom while his former tormentor General Spandidakis was under trial. Ritsos received him in a modest home to discuss the translation that Savvas intended to complete. In the interviews Savvas conducted, Ritsos revealed himself as a man of unimaginable magnamity. When questioned about his lack of bitterness, Ritsos responded that "Bitterness ages us." He goes on to explain how he survived his numerous tribulations: "I learned in the course of time that the mind is a life buoy. Work has rejuvenated me and continues to rejuvenate me...work defeats hardship" (Savvas 242).

Besides the works themselves, Savvas discovered a poignant hobby that Ritsos had undertaken: the painting of rocks and pebbles. Ritsos explained, "It's a hobby I started in Makronisos on the beach after all those hours and days, I noticed that every pebble and rock has a statement to make." Many times Ritsos acted as interpreter to these pebbles and rocks, as stones are a repeating motif in his poetry. Savvas notes the link between the pebbles and poems in that "under his [Ritsos] penetrating gaze, the simple things speak with a mystification and a new, refreshing, thought-triggering complexity" (Savvas 241).

This complexity is initially hidden in the simplicity of Ritsos' poems, which alternate between extremely brief and lengthy. The secret to this seems to be the layers of tangible and intangible meanings. Jacobson stated that Ritsos' poems "operated as if the rules of the universe were not governed by laws of physics, but rather by psychological laws capable of startling shifts, revelations we didn't know we knew, like ambushes in a dream" (Jacobson 26). One could take notice of the physical details and if they stopped there, they may think they understand Ritsos. But only by digging further can they capture both elements. For example, a statue may speak as a relic of fame, a mere artifact, or a snapshot of another time. Yet, in further investigation more than history or the fame of a single personage is revealed. They act as a "life-affirming reminder", as Richard Collins noted, and silently reveal more about those who took the time to create them and what exactly they wanted to commemorate. Collins stated, as he observed that statues appear frequently in Ritsos' poetry, "if they have no life of their own, they remind readers that they are the ones who are alive."



Yiannis Ritsos

Collins also explores the subtle elements that underlie even the shortest of Ritsos' poems. In his essay "In the Ruins of an Ancient Temple", Collins explicates the poem of fifteen lines in a comprehensive way that could fill pages with its meaning. The

methods he uses can also be applied in explicating other poems to excavate the deeper meaning. For example, simply taking note of what each character is doing sets a tone, in this case of ordinary people with their own workaday actions to perform. Then he notes how metaphors are placed that move the past forward to modern time, just as a woman hangs clothes on a statue to dry. The statue is thus "like" a clothesline, except that it was intended to immortalize someone of fame. Putting it all together shows how this simple land, filled with vestiges of an ancient time, both embraces and ignores their heritage because they are busy living-not beholden to a stony past.

Ritsos takes the forms and devices of color, movement, and sound and combines these with the unique qualities of the Greek landscape, with the white of rocks interspersed with dark visions of the sea and blood. Because of his experiences, the themes of war, suffering, and survival are frequently present. Translating such poetry requires a special hand, one that Edmund Keeley noted in his essay "Yannis Ritsos and Translation". Keeley made two important prerequisites for translating Ritsos accurately: one, Ritsos himself could not simply choose a few poems of which to permit translation, as all were subjects of his passion, and thus any translation must comprise a full body of his oeuvre. Secondly, Keeley sets the criteria for a Ritsos translation: "any poet worthy of a translator's full devotion…obviously has an abiding affection for what work he has selected for publication" (Keeley 42). Thus the new translation by Manolis, himself a noted poet of Greek nationality and with personal warmth for Ritsos from his youth onward, feels especially appropriate. He has undertaken the tremendous work of translating the majority of Ritsos' poetry in his new volume, *Yannis Ritsos, Poems.*

Born in Crete, Manolis's youth was intermingled with the poetry of Ritsos. Once a young man moved by the Theodorakis version of *Epitaphios*, he's now a successful poet in his own right who is still moved to tears hearing the refrains of those notes from half a century ago. His Greek heritage, with its knowledge of the terrain, people, history and cultural themes, makes his translation all the more true to what Ritsos intended. Having visited the very places of which Ritsos wrote, he knows how the light and sea shift, and how Ritsos imagined those changes as being a temperament and personality of the Greece itself.

The translator, Manolis

The parallels in their lives are uncanny: when Ritsos was imprisoned, Manolis' father also was imprisoned on false charges. Both men dealt with the forces of dictators and censorship, and experienced the cruel and unreasoning forces of those times. In fact, they even lived for a time in the same neighborhood. In his foreword to *Poems*, Manolis relates that he viewed him as a comrade, one whose "*work resonated with our intense passion for our motherland and also in our veracity and strong-willed quest to find justice for all Greeks.*"

In *Poems*, Manolis chose to honour Ritsos first by not just picking and choosing a few titles to translate, although that might have been far easier. Instead, he undertook the complex task of translating fifteen entire books of Ritsos work-an endeavor that took years of meticulous research and patience. It should be noted that along with the translation, edited by Apryl Leaf, that he also includes a significant *Introduction* that gives a reader unfamiliar with Ritsos an excellent background on the poet from his own perspective.

Dated according to when Ritsos composed them, it's fascinating to see how some days were especially productive for him. These small details are helpful in understanding the context and meaning. For example, in *Notes on the Margins of Time*, written from 1938-1941, Ritsos explores the forces of war that are trickling into even the smallest villages. Without direct commentary, he alludes to trains, blood, and the sea that takes soldiers away, seldom to return. Playing an active role in these violent times, the moon observes all, and even appears as a thief ready to steal life from whom it is still new. From "In the Barracks":

The moon entered the barracks
It rummaged in the soldiers' blankets
Touched an undressed arm Sleep
Someone talks in his sleep   Someone snores
A shadow gesture on the long wall
The last trolley bus went by Quietness

Can all these be dead tomorrow?
Can they be dead from right now?

A soldier wakes up
He looks around with glassy eyes
A thread of blood hangs from the moon's lips

In *Romiosini,* the postwar years are a focus (1945-1947), and they have not been kind. The seven parts to this piece each reflect a soldier's journey home.

These trees don't take comfort in less sky
These rocks don't take comfort under foreigners'
Footsteps
These faces don't' take comfort but only
In the sun
These hearts don't take comfort except in justice.

The return to his country is marked by bullet-ridden walls, burnt-out homes, decay, and the predominantly female populace, one that still hears the bombs falling and the screams of the dead as they dully gaze about, looking for fathers, husbands, and sons. The traveler's journey is marked by introspection and grim memories reflected on to the surfaces of places and things he thought he knew.

"And now is the time when the moon kisses him sorrowfully
Close to his ear
The seaweed the flowerpot the stool and the stone ladder
Say good evening to him
And the mountains the seas and cities and the sky
Say good evening to him
And then finally shaking the ash off his cigarette
Over the iron railing
He may cry because of his assurance
He may cry because of the assurance of the trees and
The stars and his brothers"

An entirely different feeling is found in *Parentheses*, composed 1946-1947. In it, healing is observed and a generosity of spirit exerts itself among those whose hearts had been previously crushed. In "Understanding":

A woman said good morning to someone –so simple and natural
Good morning…
Neither division nor subtraction To be able to look outside
Yourself-warmth and serenity Not to be
'just yourself' but 'you too' A small addition
A small act of practical arithmetic easily understood…

On the surface, it may appear simple, a return to familiarity that may have been difficulty in times of war. Yet on another level, he appears to be referring to the unity among the Greek people-the 'practical arithmetic' that kept them united though their political state was volatile. Essentially timeless, his counsel goes far beyond nationalism.

Moonlight Sonata, written in 1956, is an impossibly romantic and poignant lyric poem that feels more like a short story. In it, a middle-aged woman talks to a young man in her rustic home. As he prepares to leave, she asks to walk with him a bit in the moonlight. "*The moon is good –it doesn't show my gray hair. The moon will turn my hair gold again. You won't see the difference. Let me come with you*"

Her refrain is repeated over and over as they walk, with him silent and her practically begging him to take her away from the house and its memories:

"I know that everyone marches to love alone
Alone to glory and to death
I know it I tried it It's of no use
Let me come with you"

The poem reveals her memories as well as his awkward silence, yet at the end of their journey, she doesn't leave. Ritsos leaves the ending open: was it a dream? If not, why did she not go? What hold did the house have over her? Was it just the moonlight or a song on the radio that emboldened her?

In 1971, Ritsos wrote *The Caretaker's Desk* in Athens, where he was under surveillance but essential-

ly free. At this time he seems to be translating himself-that of how he was processing his own personal history. Already acclaimed for his work, perhaps he was uncertain of his own identity.

From "The Unknown",

He knew what his successive disguises stood for
(even with them often out of time and always vague)
A fencer a herald a priest a ropewalker
A hero a victim   a dead Iphigenia He didn't know
The one he disguised himself as His colorful costumes
Pile on the floor covering the hole of the floor
And on top of the pile the carved golden mask
And in the cavity of the mask   the unfired pistol

If he is indeed discussing his identity, it's with incredible honesty as to both his public persona and his private character. After all, he'd been nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1968 (and eight more times) and he was likely weighing, in his later years, all that he'd endured.

The beauty of this particular translation is that, while subjects and emotions change over time, they still feel united by the underlying character of Ritsos. Some translators leave their own imprint or influence, yet this feels free of such adjustment. It's as if Ritsos' voice itself has been translated, with the pauses, humor, and pace that identify the subtle characteristics of an individual.

Amy Henry is a writer and book reviewer who also reviews books for her website http://www.theblacksheepdances.com.

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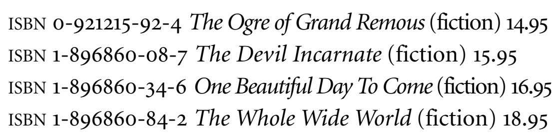

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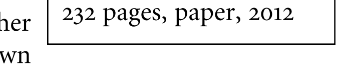
Floating Like The Dead

Linda Rogers

Just as flowers floating in a bowl carry on with their inevitable decomposition, so do the characters in Yasuko Thanh's debut collection of commentary about loss. We are all joined and separated by water as we come and go, each drop telling the human story, every death compost for the fluid medium of life.

The Journey Prize, won by Thanh for the title story, exists to remind us of our responsibility to maintain a great literary tradition in spite of reader apathy. It is amazing that in the era of sound bites and social media the short story hasn't been elevated to a higher ranking in the conventional wisdom. Publishers complain that a country blessed with writers like Mavis Gallant, Alice Munro and Alastair McLeod reluctantly makes room for new voices like Daniel Karasik (whose brilliant piece won the CBC Prize this year), and the author of this book.



Floating like the Dead
Yasuko Thanh
McClelland and Stewart
232 pages, paper, 2012

Thanh, who has the muscle to grab her readers by the throat, may just turn it around. We are fascinated and repelled by her floating dead, compelled to watch. In her brief narratives, the dead and the living dead move down the vital stream, resonating the Samurai Buddhist proverb about revenge. "The best revenge is watching the bodies of your enemies float by."

Witnessing the decomposition of evil is a form of redemption. The steady observational eye of the writer is washed with compassion. Thanh has the nerve to watch and the largeness of spirit to forgive her characters for all their lapses in integrity. The journalist Anderson Cooper reported that he realized he had crossed an invisible line when he photographed skin falling off a dead hand in the aftermath of war. At that moment, he too had become a corpse, so close was his identification with loss.

Yasuko Thanh

Thanh maintains her objectivity, the documentary eye, while

engaging an emotional response. In her stories, the reader experiences exile, the inevitable isolation that is the outer limit of community. That community may be an illusion. We are born alone and we die alone, many of us without dignity, the fate of the Chinese indentured workers afflicted with leprosy and banished to Darcy Island near the city of Victoria, made rich by the railroad they built.

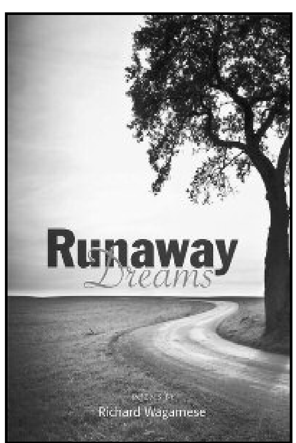
When the reader feels frustration and anger, small mercies, acts of grace sweeten the bitter soup swallowed by these marginalized human beings. Thanh, who has lived so completely in her short time as a writer, has found the balance between witness and subject, bringing wisdom to the equation of ruin and beauty, the human condition.

In her final story, "His Lover's Ghost" she takes us through the stages of mourn-

(*continued on page 31*)

The Tao of Richard Wagamese

Trevor Carolan



Runaway Dreams
Richard Wagamese
Ronsdale Press
100 p. $15.95

For the past few years Vancouver's Ronsdale Press has published book after excellent book that quietly helps explain important things for us—about who we are, or where we live. For me, the train got rolling with their fine biography of composer Jean Coulthard from William Bruneau and David G. Duke. Then came Alan Twigg's *Aboriginality* titles, Terry Watada's *Daruma Days*, and Sandra Djwa's *Professing English at UBC*—essential works in the B.C. canon. *Runaway Dreams* follows in this vein, but in a larger way because of its First Nations terrain. In a cranky nation increasingly obliged to make space in its political, economic and cultural agendas for First Nations concerns— for example, one-third of Saskatoon's population will be Aboriginal within the next three years—this poetry by Richard Wagamese expands in becoming a work of national meaning and scope.

The Seamus Heaney Poetry Centre is perhaps an unlikely place to meditate on Canadian First Nations poetry and poetics, but it is not as unconnected as one might first think. In Vancouver most of us first heard Wagamese in 2006 when he appeared at the Talking Stick Festival reading from his novel *Dream Wheels.* He cut a striking figure—vintage flat-top haircut, pointy cowboy boots and a tweed jacket, looking something between an army sergeant and a small-town college prof. His reading kicked-ass and people in the audience asked "who is this guy?" This, of course, has been precisely the bread and butter of Heaney the poet and Nobel Laureate.

The Rockies are higher than you think and they tend to cut B.C. off from a lot of what happens in the rest of Canada. Lately, we're seeing more of Wagamese. With Sturgeon Clan Ojibway roots, he writes with emotion and an insight sandpapered with 30 years experience in journalism. These days he lives outside Kamloops in the dry Thompson country and has stories from the road to share. In form, this first book of poetry mixes the trad one-page lyric or prose work with the longer form that T.S. Eliot suggested is the measure of a serious poet. Reading the long poem is normally a difficult pastime, but Wagamese is skilled in command of his materials and makes following his longer efforts as easy as slipping into a warm bath. As the collection develops, a genuine voice emerges like a Woody Guthrie talkin' blues; the voice of a veteran storyteller beneath the moon and stars. You don't need a PhD in theory to understand what he's talking about.

Unfashionable as it sounds, Wagamese brings us poems that are also declarations of faith. Not that his faith is imbued with theology or preaching, but with the living holiness of the land instead—what the Group of Seven say, could see as the real Canada, and that he knows in his own genetic way as tribal land. What colours his work are landscapes and the faces and hearts of those he's met along the road.

In "He Dreams Himself" the Wagamese walks the Winnipeg River encountering old dreams, pictographs, Cree old tongue, and the rough tangle of watersheds. "[He] feels the pulse of them on his palm / the sure, the quick heartbeat of a thing", then wakes to the erotica of his hand on a living hip bone. Temporal and eternal are brought together in the living moment, in physical intimacy.

In prose poems like "Mother's Day", "Whiteshit" and sections of "Medicine Wheel", Wagamese explores his own slow self-illumination into the mystery of who he is. This is set against a long early life in a broader culture that he says made some effort "to beat the Indian right out of me." By the time of "The Injun in this Poem" however, we see him "kneeling like an acolyte at prayer" and planting flowers. A seasoned adult, he's managed to bury the hatchet, a poet mature in the recognition that along the road he's met "Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Metis, Ojib and Sioux / Hungarian, Finnish, Scot, Australian / Brit, Quebecois and Swede" and can say with equanimity that "they all left him something to trundle down the road / and sort through later in private moments like luggage." It's this inclusiveness that makes Wagamese accessible. If the old pains and struggle are laid out in black and white, at least there's no anger or guilt trip laid on non-aboriginal readers. Through it all, "The Indian in this poem" is able to bring past and present together like a difficult line of history, and he realizes from the teachings he's acquired, and from tribal elders with their stories and ceremonies especially, that,

Richard Wagamese

> *"In those ancient symbols was a world beyond worlds, of legends alive, of a cosmology represented in the spirit of everything, of teaching built on principles, built themselves of rock and leaf and tree, bird and moose and sky, and Trickster spirits nimble as dreams, cajoling the Anishnabeg outward..."*

In overcoming the crap that a dominant culture has unthinkingly sought to impose, the poet's personal transcendence is grounded in a mature intuition that nothing of the old spiritual richness has really changed. He sees now that it is his past sufferings which are impermanent, transformed to joy through his finding and loving a woman.

Self-realization of this nature typically comes with a cost. In "What Warriors Do", a man looks at himself, at the world outside his contented cabin window. Settled now with a man's domestic chores he confronts the comic irony that "[he's] a warrior for God's sake." With age, time, the care of a woman's touch, even hardrocks yield to the wisdom of the heart because, buddy, "That's what warriors do."

It's hard to not like the book's on-the-road poems recounting the poet's time as a carney. "Runaway Dreams", and "Carnival days 1973" are accounts full of earthy voices and a young man's yearning for freedom. As a bookend to these, "Freddie Huculak"—a paean to salt-of-the-earth characters familiar to any city's tenderloin district—shows what oldtimers who've seen plenty of life's raw underbelly have to share with young men searching for authentic experience. Anything missed here we're reminded of again in "Scars":

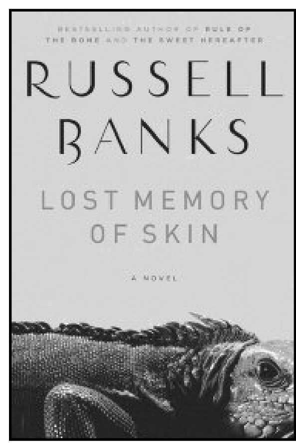
> *Time has a way of bringing you to your knees*
> *at the shrine of your own undoing*
> *hell, even outlaws learn to cry if they listen*
> *to themselves long enough*
> *and there are a lot of cell-blocks with tear-stained pillows*
> *clenched in tattooed fists."*

An unconnected series of poems written about Paul Lake might have also shaped the book's title. Contemplative exercise in watching the day or one's own soul awaken, they resonate the way a loon's cry will with the echo of the Plains tribal honour-prayer "All My Relations." It's in "To Displaced Sons", the collection's final piece that Wagamese passes along what wisdom he's acquired with its explanation how "that's the thing of it you know/ this act of discovery/ goes on forever...when people learn to live with little / they open themselves up to more." It's an offering, a nature wisdom that reduces simply to the Tao of Being Indian. Good reading, perfect for high-school students working hard at trying out their slickness in a shaky world.

(*continued on page 23*)

Under the Overpass

Richard Wirick



Lost Memory of Skin
Russell Banks
HarperCollins
416 Pages

Russell Banks spelunks the caves of the taboo like no other master of American prose. In *Affliction*, it was fratricide and incest and propane-tank arson erupting amidst the gray brush of rural winter hollows. In *Cloudspitter,* his magisterial saga of John Brown, he showed how inspirational talent and homicidal mania could exist in the same brain, feeding and enriching one another. In *The Sweet Hereafter,* children, a whole school bus full of them, could pass from the earth in an instant, a supposedly benevolent god standing in the wings and, like Joyce's paradigmatic artificer, blithely paring his fingernails.

But no one until now has had the insight and courage to tackle the world of what has come to be called the "[registered] sex offender." How could sympathy be garnered for people *that* presumably low on the moral chain of being, people down on the level of those who kill their children or fly planeloads of people into buildings?. They must, society seems to say, be deserving of all their universal, unquestionable negatives; any other weaker view learns the assessor themselves upset.

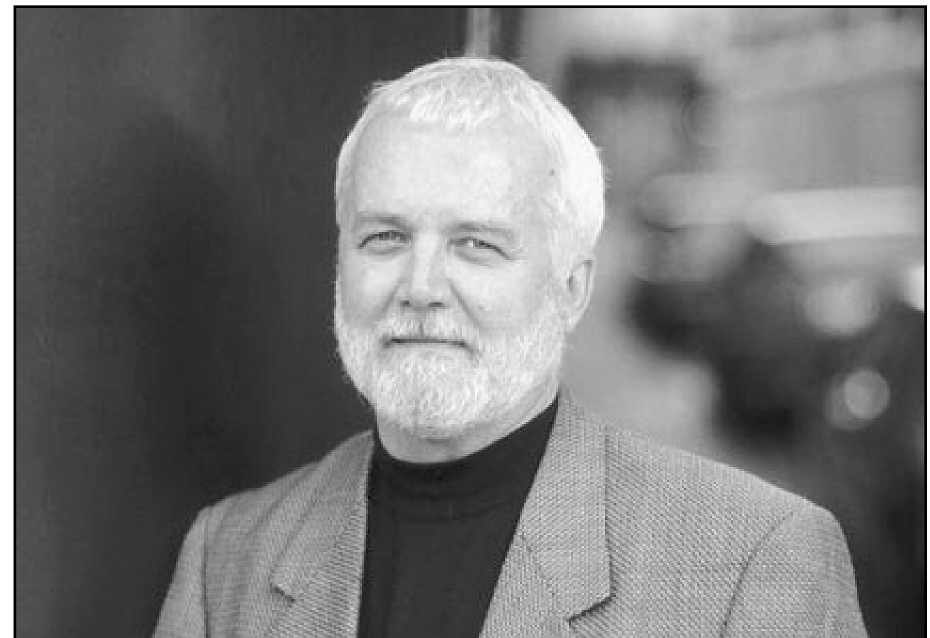
"It's become a national preoccupation," Banks told Charles McGrath of *The New York Times,* "this fear of sex crimes." "It's almost like the Salem witch trials," he said, "[But] where is the fear coming from? I don't think it's about sex so much as some deep-seated sense that we've failed to protect our children."

In *Lost Memory of Skin,* Banks takes a group of homeless marginalists and adds that tincture of perversion ["the feely-thing"] that keeps society from allowing them a footing for possible recovery. The main character is the Kid, a teen on the cusp of adulthood – actually a virgin—where "sex offense" is by no means clear and thus even remotely irredeemable. The label itself is worse than any prison, and the Kid's very movements are a means of foucaultian constriction – an electronic ankle bracelet keeps him defined and detached from schools and playgrounds, which amounts to almost anywhere, and requires unaffordable electricity to recharge. Living some of the year in Miami, Banks was taken with a group of real-life sex offenders living beneath the Tuttle Causeway in DM2 nestled against tony neighborhoods.

The irony, the circular dilemma, of course, is how society's "zero tolerance" has emptied its enforcement mechanisms of all subtlety, compassion, and tolerance. In a legal system where a nineteen-year-old has "normal" sexual contact with someone two years his junior or an investigative journalist mistakenly brushes over an FBI- monitored website, there simply are no second chances. The die is cast, their fate is sealed, and Foucault's "discipline and punish" becomes an especially insidious "classify and exclude." This rigidity surfaced in earlier recent history, with the application of aggravating circumstances in death penalty trials, and the Rockefeller drug law's removal of judicial discretion in sentencing. The post-McMartin molestation hysteria and the sheer existence of the Internet have turbocharged our longstanding sexual judgmentalism, creating a wasteland of souls barred from nearly everything at the advent of their lives.

The Kid begins to win the reader over not with his victim's status, but with his pluck and sparkling eccentricity, toting an Iguana around like a collared poodle. When the Professor, a surprised academic sociologist, shows us to study his young subject, the latter's openness makes us open up even more to him and wish for his redemption, whatever that might look like.

But the professor has demons of his own. He is arrogant, generous, brash, and endlessly inquisitive, but his obsession with homelessness may owe an explanation to his stint as a "slimy" government official informer in the 60s; it may also be a view he refuses to test by conjectures and refutation like any good social scientist. Where is the clinical data for his thesis that pedophilia is a response to powerlessness and disorder, and of modern media's sexualization of children in advertising? Is he really as detached as he claims to nubile sexual allure? Is he an actual example of what others are – under his hypothesis – falsely tagged with? Ambiguities like this keep followers of the Kid and the prof on their toes, watching Banks weave earnest personality development out of the thickest of society's sexual hypocrisy and queasy moral insecurity. We are willing to stick with them because they are battling a whirlwind, their two selves joining in a teleological puptent that shelters and values insight:



Russell Banks

> *The kid turns and peers up at the huge fat man blocking the late afternoon sun. the Professor chuckles. He's used to chuckling; it's his default form of laughter. If he must show pleasure or amusement or delight, he'd rather be seen as a chuckler, another stereotype, perhaps, but a slightly more serious one than that of the jolly fat man. He eases himself down to the ground and takes a position next to the Kid that effectively blocks the wind. The Kid tries again to light his stove and this time succeeds. The two sit there and watch the flame flare yellow and settle quickly back into a steadily purring blue blur.*

Richard Wirick is a frequent contributor to the Pacific Rim Review of Bookst and the author of the story collection,* Kicking In *(Counterpoint Press). He has been published in* Paris Review *and* The Nation. *He lives in Santa Monica, California.

RUNAWAY DREAMS (*continued from page 22*)

Big thinkers like Hans Kung and The Dalai Lama talk about the need for a new secular ethics in a global world. I think we can take it that they mean a non-denominational approach to the things the Creator, and not bankers, politicians or television producers put here that still really mean something. If that's the case, then the final lines of "The Canada Poem" with its meditation on an old Stoney woman from Alberta are something Canadian kid should have engraved in their hearts:

> *"when you learn to hold it*
> *you can learn to let it go*
> *it's how an Indian prays."*

A lot of Canadian literature in our time has been about positioning. Richard Wagamese steps around all of that. *Runaway Dreams* is about how a man has repositioned himself simply as an Indian, a regular bloke, as a citizen of Turtle Island, Mother Earth. Almost every poem here is a keeper, noteworthy for the way each rests on a cornerstone of faith, home or love. These poems are the story of a man who's seen some tough-shit out in the world and come through it to find beauty and peace. You can see him writing this in those rolling Shuswap hills around Kamloops where they still teach children that *Cowboys Always Do the Right Thing, Even When Nobody's Looking.* If you've ever felt like crying a little at what oldtimers used to call "a happy hurt", you'll understand what this guy has to say. This is the 21st Century medicine for you.

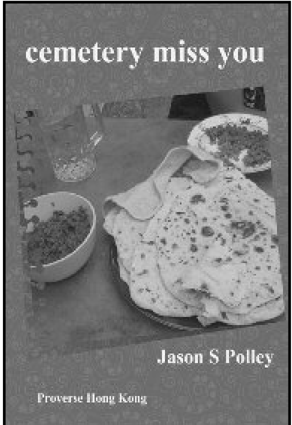
Seamus Heaney Poetry Centre, Belfast

Trevor Carolan's current work is his edited anthology* The Lotus Singers *(Cheng & Tsui).

Cemetery Miss You

JoAnn Dionne

I looked up from Jason S Polley's *cemetery miss you* and blinked at the bright day outside. A moment ago I had been following Saa Ji, Polley's anti-hero protagonist, through the shadowy backstreets of Sham Shui Po. To see a spring day in Victoria, BC, was startling. I returned my attention to the book and fell again into the underworld of Hong Kong hash dealers. *This story could be a movie* I thought.



cemetery miss you
Jason S Polley
Proverse Hong Kong, 2011
130 pp., $22.00

Though I must admit I was skeptical when I first heard how Polley created *cemetery miss you.* He had, I was told, befriended an illegal Pakistani migrant in Hong Kong, recorded hours of interviews with him, transcribed those recordings, and made a book of them. Saa Ji's story sounded fascinating, but I had nightmare visions of pages and pages of run-on text. And was that *really* writing, I wondered—typing out another's words and presenting them as *your* art? Wasn't that stealing? Exploitation?

My skepticism vanished when I opened *cemetery miss you* and saw that Polley had crafted his transcripts into poems made up of sound-bite-sized stanzas. And, as I read, I reconsidered the questions I'd had. Yes, taking another's words and presenting them as your own *is* a kind of stealing. It *is* an exploitation. But isn't that what most writers and journalists do?

Jason S Polley

What *cemetery miss you* doesn't do is hide this fact—it highlights it. The table of contents lists the poems as audio files, e.g., "folder b file 1: 0 min 17 sec". The text itself, almost all lower case with no punctuation, has the I'll-fix-it-later feel of a transcript being typed on the fly. Saa Ji's sometimes garbled syntax has not been tidied, and his rambling tangents have not been arranged into a more linear narrative. They capture how he really spoke when the recorder was running. And, near the end of the book, the audio recorder itself enters the story as Saa Ji becomes more aware—and wary—of it.

Saa Ji's story starts out strong: he has someone who wants to hear it and he's eager to tell. Born in Pakistan in the early 1980s, his upbringing is middle-class and ordinary. Saa Ji has a mother who dotes on him, a father who owns a motorbike showroom. He goes to a nice school. He prays five times a day. As a child, Saa Ji's only real delinquencies are flying kites when he should be studying.

However, at seventeen, Saa Ji begins hanging out with Zuhayr, a "handsome guy" who "use the creams on his face". Zuhayr falls in love with a girl who happens to be Saa Ji's neighbour. This makes another man, Bilal, jealous. Saa Ji is unwittingly, violently embroiled in this love triangle when, early one morning, Bilal shoots at Saa Ji's house. No one is hurt, but Saa Ji is enraged. He goes to Bilal's house, armed:

only bilal dhul i shoot at his legs
i shoot 6 bullets in the air and 6 on his feet
on his fucking legs

2 bullets were stuck inside his legs

he is still in a wheelchair

Knowing there will be retribution, Saa Ji's parents pay a man to help him escape to Korea. However, after a mix up at the Bangkok airport, Saa Ji lands in Hong Kong. He ends up in Sham Shui Po, a neighbourhood with many Pakistani migrants. He finds a room in an apartment with others, but can't find steady work. Saa Ji goes hungry for the first time in his life. He is forced to sell his passport. Soon he has "no visa/ no passport/ no money/ no anything" and is sleeping rough outside Hong Kong's iconic Star Ferry:

i pray to god that they leave the rice box and i can pick up and i
can eat that 1

they leave their mcdonald and

i pick it up
i eat that 1
i drink the water from the public toilet in tsim sha tsui

By chance he meets Tauqeer, a Pakistani hash dealer, and becomes his "delivery guy". Tauqeer gives him a place to stay and meals at restaurants. Soon Saa Ji is living a nocturnal life and learning "the business". But as Saa Ji gets further into it, his story begins to fracture. It disintegrates into macho name dropping—who runs the drugs from China, who gets busted without papers, who goes to prison—and becomes hard to follow.

In "from folder b file 6: 3 min 35 sec", he addresses the person making the recordings—a white, western male—directly for the first time. The spell of Saa Ji's narrative is broken when he tells him:

you are happy
man

you have your house
man

a fucking visa

not like fucking animal running in the street

And despite now having lots of money, food and sex, Saa Ji admits to the recorder that none of it makes him happy.

From this point, Saa Ji seems to become suspicious of the recorder. Perhaps he wonders if he's said too much and what the man recording his story will do with it. The audio files/poems become very short. In "from folder b file 10: 1 min 32 sec", Saa Ji says "Nobody gets my recording". By "gets" does he mean "understand"? Or does he mean no one else should have it? A silent blank space follows "folder b file 14: 0 min 20 sec". In the penultimate poem, "from folder b file 28: 1 min 36 sec", Saa Ji says

i dont know how to talk with the recorder on
i don't
i just cant do

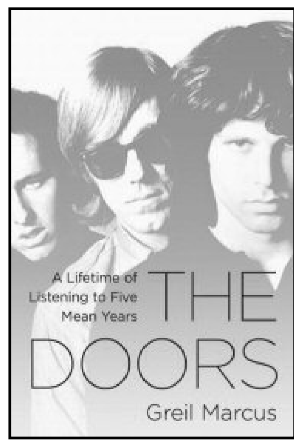
And we realize the story we've read is not just a story, not a collection of poems, not a South-Asian-film-industry-meets-Hong-Kong-cinema movie: it's a man's life.

JoAnn Dionne is the author of* Little Emperors: A Year with the Future of China, *a finalist for the City of Victoria Butler Book Prize. Her next book,* Kicking the Sky*—set in India, Hong Kong, China and Tibet—will be her thesis as she completes an MFA in Writing at UVic.

The Wrecking Crew

Joseph Blake

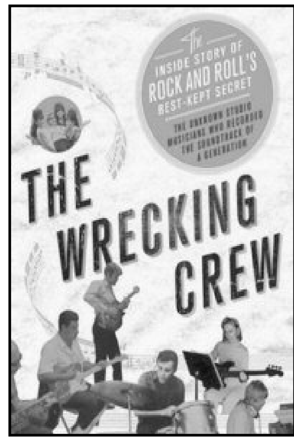
Rock critic Greil Marcus has written several important books about the cultural history of the United States. *Mystery Train, Lipstick Traces,* and *Invisible Republic* use the author's passionate investigations of rock and roll's roots to dredge-up something visionary and profound about the larger culture. By comparison, *The Doors* often feels like Marcus is trying too hard to squeeze a modest book of essays about individual songs and live performances into high art or at least his rock criticism into high art.



The Doors: A Lifetime of Listening to Five Mean Years
Greil Marcus
PublicAffairs/Perseus
2009, $25.50

That said, his work tracks an explosive episode in rock history and a cataclysmic era in California (Watts riot, Sunset Strip riot, first Human Be-ins, student protests, Haight-Ashbury, Vietnam war protests, Kennedy assassinations, Manson murders, Altamont etc.) that Marcus is cultivating fertile ground for his apocalyptic visions. Some of the detailed writing about little-heard live recordings by the Doors has a wonderfully druggy, period-perfect psychedelic aura. Other sections sound like a speed freak intellectual's rants.

The worst example of the latter is the chapter on the song "Twentieth Century Fox", where Marcus' wild, meandering verbal acrobatics link references to the pop art of Eduardo Padlozzi, Roy Lichtenstein, Chuck Berry, and George Herriman, creator of Fritz the Cat. These are seasoned with references to Ricard Hamilton's pop aesthetic, Wallace Berman's serial photography and punk poster artist Shawn Kerri—all to describe a failed pop song that Marcus finally nails down with "if 'Light My Fire' hadn't made the Doors into pop stars, you can hear how their music could have curdled into artiness, each note a parody of something else, not a word having to mean what it said…"



The Wrecking Crew: The Inside Story of Rock and Roll's Best Kept Secret
Kent Hartman
Thomas Dunne Books
304 pages, $25.99

Marcus is much more cogent in a chapter titled "The Doors in the So-called Sixties."

He writes, "The sixties are most generously described as a time when people took part—when they stepped out of themselves and acted in public, as people who didn't know what would happen next, but who were sure that acts of true risk and fear would produce something different from what they had been raised to take for granted."

Marcus snipes at the band's playing and at Morrison's shamanic stance (although it's obvious Morrison influenced shamanic punk icons like Iggy Pop and Patti Smith) and denigrates *Waiting for the Sun* and *Soft Parade* as "terrible jokes…the Doors' version of Elvis-movie soundtracks."

He's obsessed, but not an intellectual groupie devoid of critical chops. Sadly, it reminds me of an egghead-version of MuchMusic's show, *Pop Up Videos.*

Kent Hartman's *The Wrecking Crew* is a great tale badly told of the Los Angeles studio musicians behind pop hits made by Phil Spector, The Beach Boys, the Byrds, The Mamas and the Papas, The Monkees, The Carpenters, Frank Sinatra, Simon & Garfunkle and many, many other radio stars (including the Doors.) Like the Funk Brothers at Motown and country music's Nashville Cats, The Wrecking Crew were a loose confederation of anonymous studio professionals. Although Hartman goes into some detail about the making of Spector's famous Wall of Sound, and hits like "Mr. Tambourine Man", "California Dreamin'", "I Got You", "Surfin' USA", "Good Vibrations", "Bridge Over Troubled Water", "The Boxer", "The Beat Goes On", and other pop hits, the author rarely quotes his subjects directly from his self-described "extensive research." He writes as if he knows what the musicians are thinking, stringing cliché-riddled voices with his own fan-boy hyperbole like calling "Eve of Destruction" from Barry McGuire's "one of the most important songs in popular music history." Ouch!

The Doors

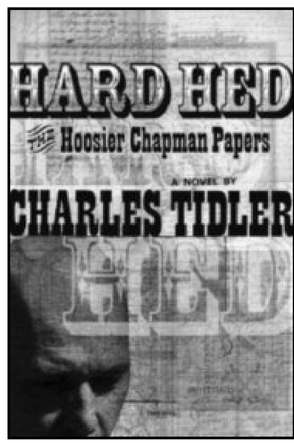
Hartman writes, "No single group of musicians has ever played on more hits in support of stars than this superbly talented-yet virtually anonymous group of men (and one woman)." Drummer Hal Blaine gave the musicians their Wrecking Crew moniker and in Hartman's estimation was "unofficial dean of the whole bunch." Larry Knetchtel, Carol Kaye, Tommy Tedesko, Al DeLory, Glen Campbell, Leon Russell, Mike Melvoin, Don Peake, Michel Rubini, and Nino Tempo were some of the main players. Hartman puts the spotlight on Glen Campbell, Hal Blaine and Carol Kaye, but most of The Wrecking Crew still seem anonymous, even after reading how their work in the studio "at the intersection of time and money" allowed big name stars to stay out on the road playing lucrative live gigs. Hartman provides little musical insight into individual studio contributions and fails to talk about the racial politics behind New Orleans-bred drummer Earl Palmer's place as the only black member of The Wrecking Crew. Hartman barely mentions Palmer. Still, there are a few interesting tid-bits. My favourite is the story of Hal Blaine digging his tire chains out of his car and into the studio for the improvised percussion on "Bridge Over Troubled Water". Listen for it!

Joseph Blake is Music Editor for PRRB.

The Wrecking Crew

Hard Hed

Nadine Lucas

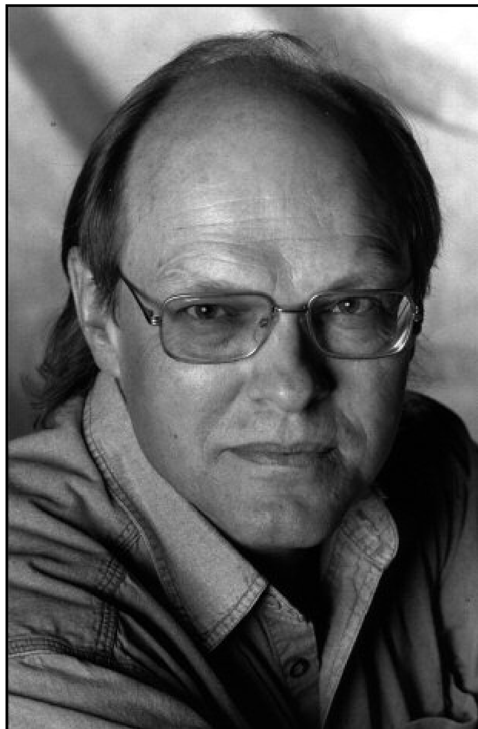


Hard Hed – The Hoosier Chapman Papers
Charles Tidler
Anvil Press

Charles Tidler's Hard Hed, a retelling of the Johnny Appleseed story, deftly moves back and forth through time, from the early nineteenth century right through to modern times. It is a novel in five books. Each book is unique in style and tone and together these individual sections form a compelling whole.

Book one is a soldier's diary of the battle of Tippecanoe in 1811. Accounts of hunting, fishing, daily allocation of rations and weather reports are punctuated with scenes of murder and ambush. Tidler's contrasting of mundane daily ritual with violent skirmish heightens the sense of horror at a genocidal campaign that forced many surviving Native Americans out of the Indiana territories. Tidler has a gift for inventing details that feel authentic and immediate. In this respect he commands his readers' attention as few fiction writers can.

In book two we move to a contemporary setting. We are introduced to Hoosier Chapman, descendant of Johnny Appleseed, distant relative to the homicidal General Linkhorn introduced in book one. Tidler's mastery of prose is evinced in descriptions of the Indiana landscape i.e. "Red barn. White farmhouse. Rectangle of freshly mown sunshine." Hoosier with "mouth and lips a rainy branch of apple tree blossoms" has just been released from prison for planting apple trees illegally. Traveling by bus through Indiana, the affable Hoosier meets beautiful university student Nancy Miami who declares herself "100% Indian, according to my daddy". A romance ensues. The bus is torn apart by a tornado. Hoosier survives in the first of a series of narrow escapes. Nancy is later murdered. In this section of the book there are thrilling shifts from realism to fantasy. Tidler makes sublime transitions from scenes of sordid violence to scenes of sensuality and tenderness. This is muscular erotic prose, brimming with vitality.



Charles Tidler

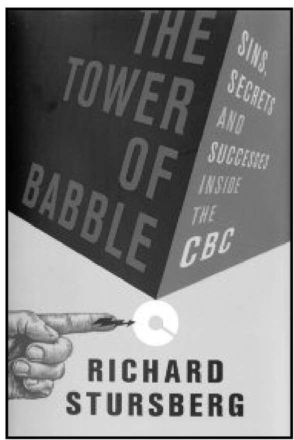
The novel shifts back in time again to the Indian wars and the evolution of the Klu Klux Klan. We are introduced to Xerxes Chapman, purported cousin of John Applejack. Xerxes lives off the land. In book three, a sharp contrast is drawn between the Native Americans' and Xerxes Chapman's reverence for the natural world and General Linkhorn's vicious campaign of wonton destruction and brutality. Yet In the face of this hard-edged subject matter there is sheer poetry. Rarely is prose simultaneously so visceral, yet beautiful. Book four shifts back to a modern setting. Cruelty towards ethnic minorities persists. Hoosier Chapman who plants apple trees is also seen as a pariah.

The language in *Hard Hed* is poetic yet concise. Each sentence is exquisitely, meticulously crafted. Tidler evokes his Midwestern roots with vivid descriptions of the Indiana landscape and the people who populate it. The final book depicts a rebirth, a fitting metaphor for Johnny Appleseed. Hard Hed is an inventive, exciting novel that warrants multiple readings.

Nadine Lucas is poet and writer living in Victoria, B.C. She maintains a foodblog* http://eatthisvictoria.blogspot.ca *and hosts a regular monthly cinema series, Subterranean Cinema.

Tell Me Something I Don't Know

Eric Spalding



The Tower of Babble: Sins, Secrets and Successes inside the CBC
Richard Stursberg,
Douglas & McIntyre
2012, 341 pages.

Richard Stursberg worked as head of English-language programming for the CBC from 2004 to 2010, "six years of abuse and success, of working until late in the night and waking with anxiety, of loving the great undisciplined beast" (p. 311). In those years, he sought to improve the public broadcaster's ratings, which had been declining for the previous thirty years. He felt that the network was too caught up in its ways and needed to be modernized to be competitive. He was also wary of its elitist attitude. For instance, when he started, the CBC on Thursday evenings was broadcasting *Opening Night*, a program focussed on the performing arts whose audience levels were, in his words, "dismal" (p. 80).

Throughout his book, Stursberg is critical of what he calls the Constituency, an educated and vocal elite who feel that public broadcasting should take advantage of its freedom from commercial pressures to provide a quality alternative to private broadcasting, through a focus on in-depth news features and high culture – ballet, the opera, symphony orchestras... Stursberg, conversely, feels that the CBC can be distinctive enough merely by supporting the Canadian content that the private broadcasters overlook, especially when it comes to the traditional fare of

Richard Stursberg

prime-time television: situation comedies, dramas and reality shows. In his view, the CBC should emphasize these popular formats. It should appeal to a broad cross-section of Canadians, rather than to the critical literati who, in his opinion, watch very little television anyways.

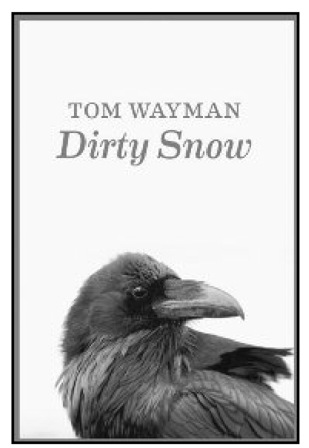
Each chapter of Stursberg's book is self-contained, with a specific theme. There is, in order, "Labour," "Entertainment," "The French," "Sports," "News," "Radio," "Money," "The Plan" and "The End." At the same time, the book as a whole reads as a novel, with a rough chronological progression from the beginning to "The End." There is dramatic tension because Stursberg is trying to effect changes that many CBC employees are reluctant to accept. The latter are proud of the network's serious and authoritative image and are reluctant to see its distinctiveness watered down in pursuit of ratings. So Stursberg has to cajole and comfort various managers, meeting with them repeatedly to convince them to accept his proposed changes. During his tenure, he succeeds in increasing viewership for the network while overseeing a two-month lockout in 2005 and sizeable layoffs in 2009. However, his argumentative style and

(*continued on page 38*)

Blood on the Snow

Sean Arthur Joyce

At last! A Canadian poet writes about this country's involvement in the Afghan war, and does so with skill and keen insight. And cunningly timed for release during National Poetry Month. Wayman has always been a political poet, from his earliest days striving to reintegrate the presence of working people in poetry. Now he has set the national record straight, creating a poetic testament that will serve to refute the glossy official version of events that will likely be crafted for the history books.



Dirty Snow
Tom Wayman
Harbour Publishing
paper, 172 pages, 2012

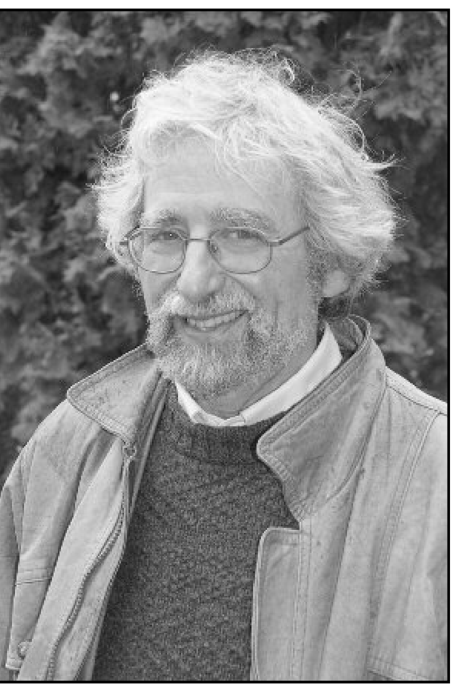
Wayman might well have titled his 18th collection of poetry *Bloody Snow* but it takes little reading between the lines to make this point. To be fair, Calgary poet Richard Harrison wrote some scathing political poems on the war in Iraq in *Worthy of His Fall* (Wolsak & Wynn, 2005), including a brilliant remake of Shelley's famous *Ozymandias* (titled *Saddamandias*). But *Dirty Snow* makes our complicity in the Afghan war its central thesis, contrasting the bombs and rocket-propelled grenades with the blissful ignorance of daily Canadian life at home. Better yet, it roots the domestic scene in the Slocan Valley, where the poet has lived for many years. A more stark contrast could hardly have been achieved.

Wayman has seized upon the central dualism, the schism at the fractured heart of the age, the psychic split that allows us to go on pretending normalcy even as our involvement in a foreign war deepens. In *Interest*, the opening poem (prefaced with Furst's quote), even though "You're not interested in considering / the war… These dead / were interested enough in the war / once they arrived at it / to die there…" Our dysfunctional dualism is made even more apparent by alternating poems from the bloody scene in Afghanistan to the crisp, invigorating mountain landscape of the Slocan Valley, where "At Lebahdo Flats / cows graze in the morning fog / as the school bus passes." It's a subtle reminder: even if all Afghani children *could* go to school, riding a bus to get there would be fraught with lethal risk.

Not content to maintain the fiction that the suffering and dying of Afghanis and Canadian soldiers is 'a world away,' Wayman fuses the two in a single poem sequence, as in *Mt. Gimli Pashtun*. "A loss thrums in the soil here, / vibrates in the cold alpine wind. / Here the Pashtuns blown apart, or maimed / by bullets released in the name of this country / now dwell…" By transposing the carnage from Afghanistan to this snowy peak in our own backyard, the poet is reminding us that no matter how separate from the conflict we may think we are, there's a spiritual cost we all pay for such duplicity. "Those who rule us have sent / men and women with our money / to kill to protect a corruption / struggling against another corruption…" We may think we can ignore it, disavow our complicity, but as the poem majestically concludes over the glittering snows of Mt. Gimli: "In the serenity / above treeline / a spreading stain bleaches half the sky. / To the south, amid dim cloud mounds, / are flashes of light: detonations / of an improvised / innocence." This is pure brilliance—a masterful stroke of political art.

Though it may seem a tired comparison by now, the fact that the propaganda masters have so successfully swept the bloody spectre of Vietnam under the rug bears repeating. This Wayman does in *The Ghost of Lyndon Baines Johnson Appears as Guest of Honour at a Ramp Ceremony for Three More Slain Canadian Soldiers*. A funeral is an appropriate place for ghosts to haunt, especially for those brutally cut from life. Wayman sees not only the fabric of the present rent by a hypocritical war but the curtain separating us from the past. He reprises President Johnson's words from 1965 that "we don't want American boys to do the fighting that Asian boys should do," but the poet is too complex a thinker to paint *any* of the combatants in righteous terms. Another voice appears out of the air at the funeral to warn that, "if you stop when Afghan police order stop, / they rob you. If you don't halt, / they kill you." And yet a third voice is heard piping across the veil that separates the dead from the living, a Pashtun fighter reciting the Muslim hard-liners' view that "girls are not to be educated, uh that such an act / is contrary to the holy word…" The ultimate result of all this fundamentalist brainwashing, from whatever side, is that, along with the bodies of dead soldiers, Canada itself is pitched spiritually "into the yawning dark."

The war metaphor carries on throughout *Dirty Snow*, appropriately. In the section *My Wounds*, Wayman writes elegies to loved ones and deceased members of the Slocan Valley community. Once again the poet introduces each poem with an epigraph that provides some insight into why he chose to include the piece. These take the place of a Foreword or Introduction, the writing of which seems to have been discouraged in poetry collections over the years. Yet Wayman's epigraphs often provide fascinating details or perspectives that add to, rather than take away from, the poems. For example, prefacing the poem *Snow Right to the Water*, he notes: "Even in peacetime, death shadows our lives. One of the devastating events that happens to us all in the normal course of life is the loss of a parent, then the other. I remember reading the see-sawing statistics from Afghanistan on which side killed the most civilians in a given month: the enemy, or ourselves. I doubt it was a comfort to any individual to think that at least their mother or father was shot or blown up by the forces of truth, justice and light…"



Tom Wayman

By using these epigraphs to tie back into the Afghan war theme, Wayman never lets us off the hook, even when the poems veer into more personal or abstract concerns. It's the exact opposite of what the corporate media does—fracturing our attention span precisely so that we do NOT call our leaders on the carpet for murdering in our name. In this, Wayman is connecting to an ancient tradition in poetry alluded to by the late Irving Layton, who called poets "prophets and the sons of prophets" (in his sometimes sexist way, forgetting of course the other half of that equation). Prophets not in the sense of foretelling the future but like the Old Testament prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, stinging the collective conscience, bearing witness that all is not as it should be in the Promised Land. It's not easy, it's not pretty, but someone has to do it. And if readers can't take it, too bad. As Layton said, poets aren't entertainers; if you want entertainment, turn on CNN or the Disney channel.

But if you pick up that remote you'll be missing the sheer scope and grandeur that poetry brings to our lives, even when it forces us to confront our own shadow. And confronting our collective shadow may just prevent us from being swallowed up by it:

> *A shrill wail at these losses, this pain*
> *—a sobbing from far within the earth*
> *also grieving*
>
> *Tears ascend through soil*
> *toward light*
> *As they flood forth*
>
> *they blaze into flame*
> *and are buoyed away by air*
> *like particulates of ash*
>
> *or insects*
>
> *adrift*
> *among these mountains*
>
> (*Wasps and the Fires*, III)

Sean Arthur Joyce is an historian and poet living in New Denver. He is the author of* Star Seeds *(New Orphic Publishers).

Passages

Linda Rogers

Passages
Emile Ollivier, trans. by Leonard Sugden
Ekstasis Editions
paper, 172 pages, 2003

A decade has passed since the death of Emile Ollivier and the translation of his heroic *Passages* by Leonard Sugden, but in the stream of life when everything passes more than once, like the small army of Cuban revolutionaries that kept circling Herbert Matthews of *The New York Times* who reported a massive resistance in the Sierra Madre and may have facilitated a free Cuba, time dissolves and truth endures in the great flow of being.

We are all mostly water, one element with zero degrees of separation; and it is not surprising that our greatest literature represents the many in the one, our lesser molecules beginning and ending in the cosmic flood. We come out of the sea, literally and figuratively, our birth waters turning dangerous as soon as we breathe, auguring inevitable death and potential redemption.

Stasis is real death. All hummingbirds in the Garden of Good and Evil, we must keep moving. That is the matrix of optimism and change, the dialectic pattern of life.

Ollivier was born in Haiti, where natural disasters, earthquake, flood and famine, continually test human resilience. He joined the exodus to francophone Montreal, the cultural crossroads where he maintained an exile's view of the human story.

A story that is old and new, *Passages* resonates the ongoing narrative that began when our dolphin antecedents left the convulsive Pangea, the First Continent. In the African diaspora, we find the roots of our culture, dispossessed men and women thirsty for perfection, questing for ideal society.

This is the impetus of Amedee Hosange, who risks leaving his afflicted village in the Caribbean for the unknown because he is a navigator who trusts the waters that will take him to the city of lights, where there is no hunger and no oppression.

Hosange's story is written parallel to the quest of Normand, an expatriate who aborts his journey back to the islands when the sirens of Miami call, inviting heart failure, the collapse of his repatriation.

Surprised by happiness, his carnal weakness, Normand "accompanying his chronic affliction, throbbing inside him like the strains of a tango, a continual search for an inner harmony and a desperate pursuit of some Absolute…" settled for less than the whole truth, sex and death without redemption, "…when Amparo, having escaped her everyday mediocrity, gave the sea the silent gift of her nakedness." No noble Penelope this ordinary woman who interrupts his journey, no weaving and unweaving of the fateful tapestry. This is reality as apposed to myth and reality takes him down, when he succumbs shortly after the funeral of the shipwrecked Hosange.

So long as Ollivier the storyteller has his ear in a seashell, his rhythms, the urgent tempo of moving water, move this story back to its source. When, like his flawed Odysseus, he stops to editorialize instead of traveling with the flow of sound and image that make this book a delight, he interrupts the journey, "The music flowed on like some gentle stream. This was abruptly replaced by a pretentious theme and the voice of a male announcer declared…"

Emile Olivier

The temptation to tell rather than show is a human failing. When does the heart stop to take its pulse? When does a snowy morning ever interrupt our delight in its brilliance with a caption that explains the obvious?

Ollivier's picaresque novel invites comparisons with other Twentieth Century Homers, James Joyce, whose *Ulysses* is a seminal fountain of interior artistry and Derek Walcott, also an islander, whose epic poem *Omeros* won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

In all three epics, written by men physically and psychically surrounded by the sea and amniotic waters, past and present are braided in seaworthy ropes that offer ironic security in unsafe waters. Like every human story, theirs are different and the same, every hero carried on waves controlled by the moon, to mortality.

The enduring storytellers are female, women with tidal intelligence beyond the understanding of heroic men. Life rushes through Ollivier's female narrators in a vicarious torrent of words and music which Leyda, wife of the questor equipped with his own compass, a brainless vogageur, describes as "the sounds of a troubled sea." She understands the sea is the nuisance ground of the universe, the final solution and matrix of genesis.

It is always appropriate to mention the translation. Sugden, who rendered *Passages* from the French, has maintained the flow of the original, and it is doubtful he is the one who added the occasional subordinate clauses that explicate rather than illuminate. Life and Ollivier's novel in translation demonstrate the significance of reflected light. Translation is a difficult art, and Sugden swims with the current that cycles with his master's voice, satellite of the female planet:

> *How would we sing in a foreign land*
> *We left weeping*
> *We will return in song*

Linda Rogers appears elsewhere in this issue. Her latest book is* Raised the Homing *(Ekstasis Editions).

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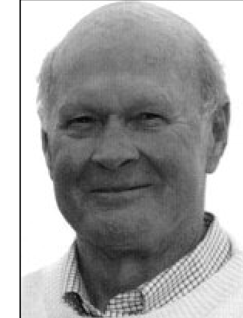

Stanley Evans has been a soldier, a seaman, a college instructor and an Open University tutor. His previous novels are *Outlaw Gold*, *Snow-Coming Moon*, and the first five books in the Silas Seaweed series: *Seaweed on the Street, Seaweed on Ice, Seaweed Under Water, Seaweed on the Rocks* and *Seaweed in the Soup*. He lives in Victoria, BC.

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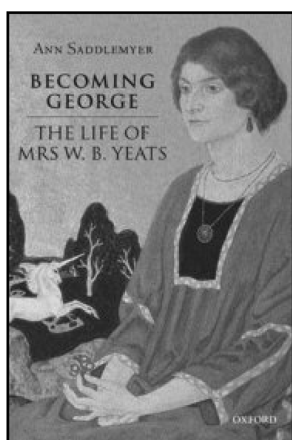
Becoming George: The Life of Mrs W.B. Yeats

Andrew Parkin

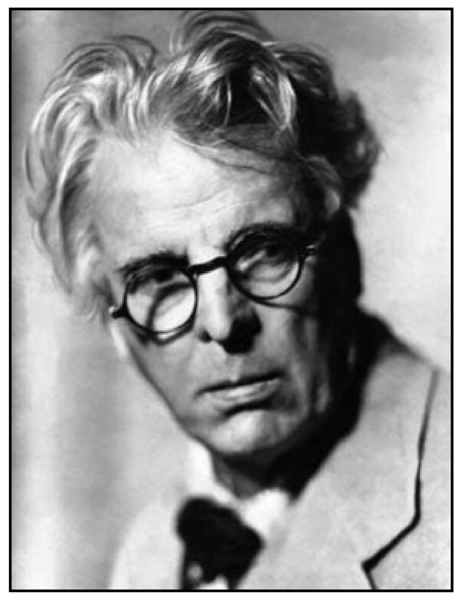


Becoming George: The Life of Mrs W.B. Yeats
Ann Saddlemyer
Oxford University Press
2002, 808 pages

Professor Saddlemyer has long been the greatest living Canadian literary scholar in what we once called Anglo-Irish Studies, now more often known as modern Irish literature in English. This long-needed book confirms her supreme place in the field, if confirmation were needed for a general editor of Cornell's Yeats drama manuscripts series.

Ann Saddlemyer has more recently published the letters of W.B. and Mrs. George Yeats to each other. Her life of George obviously draws on this rich source of both intimate and more routine lifestyle details. What we already knew was that W.B. Yeats was in a strange situation before his marriage. He was distressed at being unmarried, without heirs and a family of his own. He was distressed because his long-wooed Maud Gonne would not marry him. We know that her daughter Iseult had once proposed to him when he deemed her too young; neverteheless, he later proposed to her. Although she refused his proposal she kept him a while "in tow" and even contemplated a lengthy towing. His marriage to George seemed propitious but he had the feeling that he was through the marriage betraying three people. This book gives us the most detailed and measured account so far of the brief wooing of George (in contrast to her lengthy training in occult matters). It also shows us George's achievement through her own automatic writing and mediumship. Quite simply, she made the marriage work, she indicated a new direction for Yeats's major poetry and his own occult studies. It has often been repeated that Maud Gonne's not marrying W.B.Y. ensured the continued writing of his poetry. This book proves to my mind that it was his marriage to George that ensured his emergence as the greatest of all twentieth century poets writing in English.

The book gives a thorough and vital account of George Yeats's youthful adherence (as Miss Georgie Hyde-Lees) to serious study of medieval astrological texts, investigation of occult activities and mediums, as well as her record of adherence to the Order of the Golden Dawn, of which W.B.Yeats was a prominent member. He was, it seems, one of her examiners as she climbed through the ranks of this society. She was grooming herself and being groomed by Yeats, even if he didn't realize it, to become a suitable wife. Although young enough to be his daughter when they married, she was well prepared for a life of occult study with her husband. Unlike W.B., George, as she preferred to be known, picked up foreign languages rather easily, her reading not being confined to works in English or to English translations alone. This biography plots in detail George's marriage and her roles not only as wife and mother of the children W.B.Y. had longed for, but also as a medium capable of automatic script supposedly dictated by spirits. The Yeatses' adventures of this kind are well-documented, using evidence from the letters as well as the occult notebooks. The claim that the spirits were, through the newly-weds, constructing a religio-philosophical system that would give images and metaphors for Yeats's poetry gave George two great advantages over the poet's previous lovers: first, George could be his partner and in certain ways a guide in occult study, for she was learned in the writings that were of interest to him; and second, by furnishing from her conscious and unconscious minds new images for his poetry, she was in effect his muse. Where Maud Gonne had been his earlier muse, George was the muse for a poetry that became more philosophical, at times earthy, and had a more mature grasp of realities, social and personal than did much of his earlier work.



William Butler Yeats

George and W.B. Yeats

This biography steers its way through a tumult of fact and detail by means of chapters that organize George's life into convenient milestones, *les jalons de la vie.*

In Part I, the book's early chapters up to and including the first year of marriage deal as is usual with ancestry, girlhood, and so on, but they also give us insights into the society of Georgie's youth. The heading 'George' introduces Part II and marks her role as a well-organized wife who established her position and influence albeit after a shaky start to the marriage, and who became mother of a girl, Anne, and a boy, Michael, as well as an essential secretary, organizer, travel agent, and counselor to be relied on for practical good sense as well as mediumship. Parts III and IV give the details of the marriage during which Yeats became the established Nobel-Prize-winning dramatist and major poet, continuing until his death.

Under the heading Mrs. W.B. Yeats, Part V "maps" the life of the widow from 1939 to her death in 1968. During this period she was able to guide posthumous publications through the publishing process, keep track of the manuscripts, and help growing numbers of Yeatsians. It is thanks to the care and generosity of the Yeats family that so many manuscripts tracing the evolution of major Irish poetry and drama repose in the National Library of Ireland today. The generations of scholars too young to have known W.B. or George Yeats personally are still able through the manuscripts to relive imaginatively the workings of a major writer's mind. Ann Saddlemyer has written a biography of George but also produced a fitting memorial to a woman who is a key to the last twenty years of her husband's life and through her guardianship of his writing and manuscripts a benefactor of international scholarship.

Professor Saddlemyer writes a clear, readable English, full of the kind of detail we want to know. The book draws on so many different sources that its notes, handily arranged by chapter and page sequences, number 3,308 in all! This gives an idea of the immense range of material the author has used to construct her life of an extraordinary and learned young woman who became the wife of a genius and mother of his two very talented children. This biography ends with George's funeral. At that time, her daughter Anne received a letter George had written to her in the March following Yeats's death in 1939. The last page of this biography contains a remarkable passage from the letter that reveals something of George's wisdom:

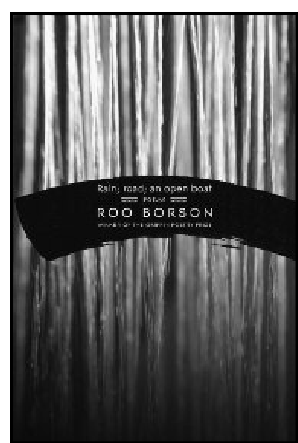
> *I have brought you up, as I believe, with a sense of freedom…And I do not want either you or Michael to lose the sense of truth because external circumstances, however difficult, make it. It is really one of the few things that matter.* (p. 654).

Andrew Parkin writes from Paris. His latest book is **Star With A Thousand Moons** *(Ekstasis Editions).*

Rain; Road; an Open Boat

Yvonne Blomer

When *Short Journey Upriver Toward Oishida* came out and was shortlisted and then won the Griffin Poetry Prize in 2005, I was living in England. I travelled to Ireland for the poetry festival where I heard Borson and Charles Simic, the Griffin's international winner, read. I was instantly captured by Borson's tone and voice in the memoir-like haibun-ish poems.



Rain; road; an open boat
Roo Borson
McClelland & Stewart
2012, 88 pages, $18.99

In *Rain; road; an open boat*, Borson's work, again slides between forms. This collection of poems reads like snippets of memory, moments captured and dream-like memories. One prose paragraph flows into its finishing haiku into the next short prose into a long lineated poem. It is as if Borson is letting the words take precedent and fall into whatever form they wish, like the carver who finds the shape that lies in the wood already. Here prose and poetry, dream and experience collide into haiku and haibun and epigrams and lineated poems. Not always strictly haibun, not always strictly lyrical poetry, not necessarily autobiographical. Here are poems that hold the reader in a deep conversation that excites and calms in turn.

To suggest that Borson simply allows the language to fall into any form is to suggest that there is no hand in there, no intent or craft. This would be a falsehood, but perhaps in the finest crafted poem, or work of art, the piece is so a part of its creator, reflective of her, that the places where the writer separates herself from the work is seamless. Perhaps the reader can bring what they imagine of the writer back to the piece as well as what they imagine of themselves.

In *Rain; road; an open boat* Borson begins with "Various Landscapes" a poem that pulls you in with a haiku:

> *The narrow*
> *guest bed –*
> *what will you dream?*

Roo Borson

She then expands on this image in a paragraph that is grounded in a specific but unnamed house; grounded in specific details – "This is the moment chanterelles and beletus come up" without any specifics of place or character. This imbues the prose with a dream-like quality. As the entry point to the collection, this poem gives a suggestion of form – the haibun – and of approach – image and details. The details almost abstracted so that the reader wonders where is here, and then begins to forget to wonder and simply sits in anticipation of image or moment or shift.

Where *Short Journey Upriver Toward Oishid*a uses chapter breaks to separate shifts in form, *Rain; road; an open boat* is not as concerned with separating forms into sections so that we naturally move from the opening haibun into a series of prose poems, to a haiku, to a lineated poem to italicised prose.

Borson evokes place in many poems such as "Durham" and "A Place in the Woods". In these poems we know exactly where she or the narrator is (I read them as personal poetic narratives), but not who she is with or at what point in time. Sometimes we have no idea where exactly the narrator is speaking from, but the details are so exact. Sometimes, I was stopped in a poem wanting to know where and with whom and sometimes the images allowed me to let go of that curiosity. Perhaps an emergent form here in specificity made vague by, perhaps, protecting the personal experience from the experience of the poem.

The second section of the book, "Rain; Road" is my favourite. Here Borson blends the haibun with the epigram so that there are delightful haiku and then there are quietly funny epigrams:

> *Having been told at different times in my life that I am gifted, stupid, beautiful, homely, have perfect pitch and a tin ear, I've now begun to wonder on what grounds anyone's opinions can be taken seriously. But then this is the opinion of a person who is gifted, stupid, beautiful, homely, with perfect pitch and a tin ear –*

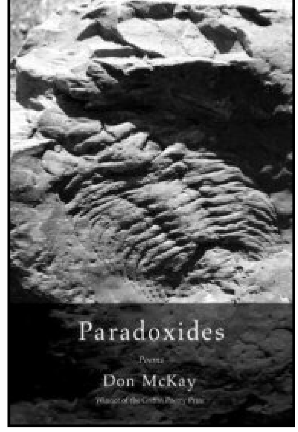
And my other favourite:

> *There should be a plant whose common name is False Patience. And another called False Promise. Maybe the most delicately structured of the thus-far unnamed common plants, one with feathery fronds and tiny yellow flowers, should be called False Promise. How beautiful it would be, now that spring is here, to walk through the meadow rife with False Start.*

I remember from *Short Journey...* that Borson had left poetry, or it had left her, for a while and this collection was experientially a way back to writing; a way of exploring if poetry still had meaning for her. Her parents' deaths left her in a place of deep mourning and loss. In *Rain; Road* there is no doubt, there is no hesitation. What was a deep exploration of how poetry might still be a part of Borson's life in *Short Journey* is more a personal meditation on place and how its meaning changes over time. Through form, Borson explores what it means to be alive and mortal in the natural world with its ever-present human influences.

Perhaps, in poetry, something is happening. A blending of lineated poems and prose poems or memoir or poetic memoir or lyrical narrative, or each poet being teased toward the form of memoir to dabble in language and in personal story. In Roo Borson's work there is prose that reads as lyric memoir. Look to Betsy Warland's Breathing the Page, a book centered on reading and writing, where she has written personal prose that is pure poetry. Look at Arleen Pare's recent novel Leaving Now and see fiction that is lyric and autobiographical.

I turn to Don McKay and find poems that are poems – language and lineation; play and metaphor. I find narrative pieces that read like memoir. It is a surprise to delve into the poems of a book and turn the page to find narrative prose. A delight. A leaping off the cliff. A contemplative wondering.



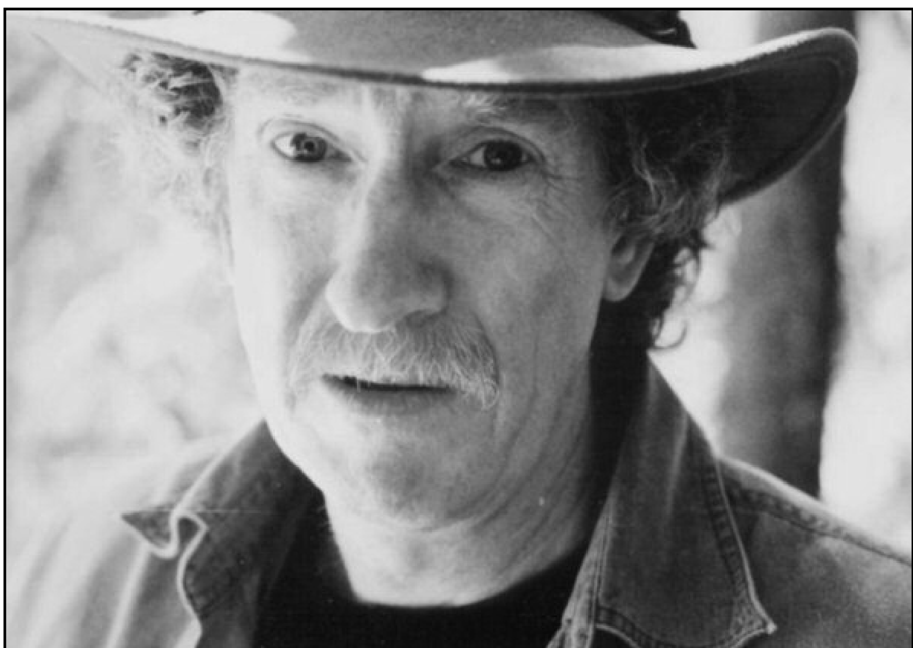
Paradoxides
Don McKay
McClelland & Stewart
2012, 96 pages, $18.99

In McKay's twelfth collection of poetry, *Paradoxides*, he plays. The first poem of the book starts with "Play it con brio, a muscular/ iamb, a Frisbee sizzling –" and so, he does. After the opening poem, we enter the first of five numbered sections. Here are poems that I want to read twice, want to stay in the sounds of – that echo of birds or the days, then want to enter the sense – both sensory and the sense of meaning, my feet tracking rhythms:

from "Song for the Song of the Canada Geese"

> *Something of winter, something of winter*
> *again, something of that famous mortal reed*
> *making an oboe of the throat.*
> *As though the soul – not*
> *so much in pain as under pressure –*
> *yelped, Angst,*
> *angst, bite-sized bits of loneliness sent...*

In these first poems, McKay mingles the animal-natural world with the mundane



Don McKay *Photo: Jan Zwicky*

things of the human world to create metaphor and surprise. In "Song for the Song of the Common Loon" he writes, "...yodelling for no one and ignoring us,/ the collectors, with our heads full of closets,/ our hearts full of ovens,/ and our sad feet."

Just as I begin to worry that the poems are sounding too alike, their approach too much from the same stance, McKay changes pace: "Honey, if you had some of this in a carafe/ you would mix yourself a comic opera out of/ willow, willow, willow, chemotherapy, and/ washing your socks in the sink," from "Song for the Song of the Purple Finch". Wow!

This poems is the beginning of a reoccurring motif in the collection – that of a stage which the narrator is not a part of, but a watcher and mere audience member. Later in the book, in "Apparition", McKay writes of watching three foxes from inside a Hyundai Sonata:

> *Inside it we are rapt, two feedback loops,*
> *poured into the binoculars and re-imbibed*
> *as sharpness – ear, paw, whisker,*
> *nose. Then something offstage calls*
> *and, like that, three vanish,...*

It is in the third section of the collection that the three part, genre-blended title piece "Paradoxides" falls into the readers lap. This three-part piece sits in the middle of this section, like a silent trilobite. The first few poems give a sense of the section, so the reader is set in place before encountering "Paradoxide's" first piece "Cephalon" which is written in lyrical nonfiction. From "Cephalon" the head of the trilobite, we move to "Thorax" the body and "Pygidium" the tail that, presumably, McKay finds on his walk in what was the micro-continent of Avalonia (before the land mass split and became the Avalon Penninsula, Wales, Ireland, New Brunswick and Massachusettes).

I love what McKay is playing with here. He is exploring the metaphors of life in this prehistoric fossil, in the tuff and the minerals and the echoes of history that reside in the land itself. It is a powerful metaphor in which to play. In "Thorax", the second poem in "Paradoxides", he continues to draw on the allusion of the theatre: "For they anticipate lobsters, the Pre-Raphaelites, the tenor saxophone, and the buckskin jacket/.../For they appear like a fully accoutred medieval knight stepping onto a nearly empty stage," and later "for they mean yet do not speak or write". McKay reminds us that he is merely an observer, a man intrigued and linking this thing with this moment.

In the fourth and penultimate section of the book, I'm delighted to find the long piece that McKay presented at the Vancouver Writers Festival in 2011 titled "Thingamajig". This poem was commissioned by David Maggs as part of Vancouver's "Greenest City Conversation". It is a three-part exploration in prose and poetry of three things in McKay's possession – his walking stick, his boots and his rocking chair. It is a playful long piece that explores in metaphor and memoir these objects and what they mean in McKay's life. The explorations sit alongside definitions of the word "thing" as well as philosophies of thingness. It is marvelous to have "Thingamajig" in a collection where McKay is perhaps searching for meaning in the larger morasses of the world.

McKay ends this natural-world-focused collection of poems with thoughts on mortality in "Taking the Ferry" in the beginning lines: "Some day I will abandon them — / the old pine desk and comfortable sofa..." and then ends with the poem "Descent":

> *In the end*
> *he leaves the difficult lyre*
> *behind and clambers down, handhold*
> *by outcrop by ledge,*
> *shedding talent, fame*
> *fading like a tan...*

So that what he does as a man – hiking the difficult scrub lands to explore those ancient trilobites – becomes metaphor too for age and for life and death:

> *...Now the rocks*
> *rub raw the bone. Gravel,*
> *scree. Who will name*
> *the dark's own instrument? Riprap,*
> *slag. Music*
> *tearing itself apart.*

So that in the end music, McKay's poems, echo in a land that was Avalonia, but has torn itself apart to make these newer lands that are connected through fossils, and through this man's experiences and back to his poems.

Yvonne Blomer's first book* a broken mirror, fallen leaf *was shortlisted for the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award. Yvonne Blomer is the Artistic Director of Planet Earth Poetry in Victoria BC. Her most recent collection of poetry is* The Book of Places *(Black Moss Press).

YASUKO THANH (*continued from page 21*)

ing as a young man living with AIDS disengages himself from the fiction of a happy ending. Sometimes the hardest thing about dying is the refusal of survivors to let go.

"What do you say to someone who is dying? What words do you use and in what tense?"

This is the greatest pain of leaving. Floating must be a relief after swimming against the natural order of things. His ghost calls him and he knows he will go. Call death infidelity, but it is a greater loyalty.

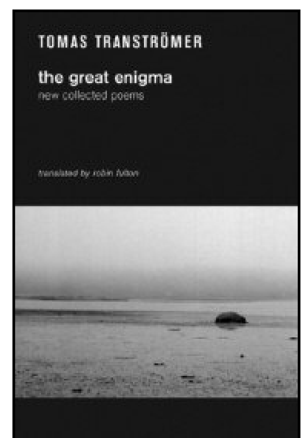
Thanh, whose name is a map of Asia, rides her rusty bicycle across the firmament, taking her readers to the condemned countries of her imagination: Mexico, Vietnam, Canada, China and death row, the land of meaningless revenge. She doesn't mind hitchhikers. They are her albatross as she crosses the night sky reciting the canticles of grief.

Linda Roger's short story "Darling Boy" appears in the Carter Vanderbilt Cooper Prize anthology from Exile Editions.

"Carrying a Brimful Pail"

James Edward Reid

There is such density in Tomas Tranströmer's poetry, and such a wide range of images and concerns. It may be best to focus on several representative selections from different poems in this fine collection of poetry and prose from 1954 to 2004, a half century of his work.



The Great Enigma: New Collected Poems
Tomas Tranströmer
Translated by
Robin Fulton
New Directions Books
262 pages, 2006 $19.00

The first poem in the *Baltics* sequence collected in *The Great Enigma* holds an arresting image. The stanza containing this image bears reading aloud a number of times. It is representative of the stirring perception and mundane precision that characterize much of Tranströmer's poetry. In this poem he describes the work of his grandfather, who was a ship's pilot "before the age of radio masts," and ship to shore communication. At that time a pilot was expected to know the topography of the seabed like the back of his hand. His grandfather's ship sets out at night in thick fog, "half blind ahead", navigating until suddenly "At one single stride / the cape emerged from the invisible and was right on them." His grandfather's "eyes read straight into the invisible":

> *The minutes passed.*
> *Shallows and skerries he memorized like psalm verses.*
> *And that feeling of "we're just here" that must be kept, like carrying a*
> *brimful pail without spilling a drop.*

"*We're just here*" is not *sotto voce*, or even a whisper, but surfaces in a vast silence, almost prayerful. The Lord of those psalms may have been his grandfather's co-pilot, but he faced the most dangerous choices alone, and with perfectly balanced care for the ship and everyone aboard. A precision and care that Tranströmer has inherited, or come to on his own.

A few pages later, in the prose introduction to the fifth *Baltics* poem, Tranströmer describes a strait "swarming with jellyfish today for the first time in years". Then he surprises the reader again with a sudden shift from the prosaic to the revelatory: "if you take them out of the water their entire form vanishes, as when an indescribable truth is lifted out of silence and formulated into an inert mass." His description of this process is the reverse of the transformation he has just presented.

The sixth *Baltic* opens with the story of how his great grandparents could not care for his beloved grandmother Maria, and abandoned her to strangers after sailing "from island to island" asking "Who can take Maria?" She becomes "an unpaid servant" in a household where "the mask of piety cracks," as false piety always will. However, she develops the unusual gift of sharing precognitive communication with Tomas:

> *I remember her. I would press close to her*
> *and at the moment of death (the moment of crossing?) she sent out a*
> *thought*
> *so that I—a five-year-old—understood what happened*
> *half an hour before they rang.*

A five-year-old boy receives a message from his distant grandmother that she is dying, a half an hour before a call from her hypocritical masters. In Tranströmer's hands, the miraculous lines are utterly true.

In "Citoyens" from *The Truthbarrier*, he dreams of Danton and Robespierre. His cautionary description of how "Robespierre spends a careful hour each morning on his toilette" recalls the civilized manner Roberto Calasso describes, in which "The bigots of philanthropy had their neighbors' heads cut off with extreme sensitivity." (*The Ruin of Kasch*). In Tranströmer's poem, it is night, "And—as always in dreams—no sun." Is this true of everyone's dreams? In the Parisian night of the Great Terror, a rarely presented truth about the nature of human betrayal surfaces in the final unfinished line of "Citoyens" . . . as unfinished, and true, and present as the terrible history of the 20th century.

"Schubertiana" opens with a view of New York City from above. The poem's final lines compress so suddenly that I stopped reading to put on a Schubert sonata,

Tomas Transtromer

and then read the poem again:

> *I know too—without statistics—that right now Schubert is being played*
> *in a room over there and that for someone the notes are more*
> *real than anything else.*

A generous selection of Tranströmer's prose also appears in *The Great Enigma*. "How the Late Autumn Night Novel Begins" opens with the narrator's edgy disembarkation alone from a ferry in darkness at an undisclosed location. He passes a night that would try other men's souls, hearing "someone knocking in a wall, someone who belongs to the other world that was left behind here, knocking, wanting back. Too late . . . The other world is this world too." For a moment, it seemed as if Tranströmer might be moving toward something eerie, like the risks Odin took in order to gain the power of poetry. But in the morning, the narrator wakes to "A crawling stack of roots. Stones with faces. The forest is full of abandoned monsters I love."

Tranströmer's favourite poem in the book is "*For the Living and the Dead*". It is four lines, and awaits the reader about three quarters of the way through the collection:

> **Female Portrait, 19th Century**
>
> *Her voice is stilled in the clothing. Her eyes*
> *follow the gladiator. Then she herself is*
> *in the arena. Is she free? A gilt frame*
> *strangles the picture.*

It seems to be a quiet little poem on first reading. But, is only her voice stilled? Do the eyes of another also follow the gladiator? Does the other follow her into the arena? Is she free? Is the other free? Who is the other? Does the gilt frame strangle only the picture? Did the Nobel Prize Committee spend much time mulling over this poem?

The Great Enigma, like the most enjoyable enigmas, calls for rereading. I will be rereading Robin Fulton's translation until his 2011 accusation is settled. He has claimed that in another Tranströmer translation by Robin Robertson, "An excessively large number of Robertson's lines are identical to mine in my Transtromer translations." http://www.the-tls.co.uk/tls/public/article791993.ece

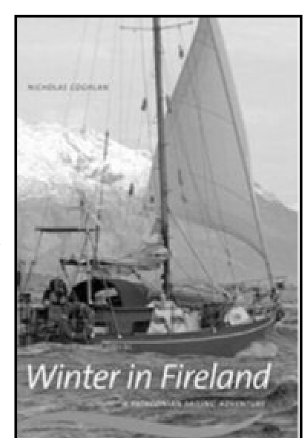
There is something grave, yet light in Tranströmer's work. A peculiarly Nordic light, and darkness. He's plainspoken, yet intricate. Complex, yet accessible. I cannot think of another poet like him. He has something of Dickinson's capacity for deceptive profundity. Muldoon's fearlessness, without all the rest of it. William Carlos Williams' clarity. Something like Milosz's moral fibre, and Denise Levertov's goodness.

***James Edward Reid is a regular contributor to PRRB. He also publishes in* The Sarmatian Review *and* Vallum: new international poetics*, and most recently published "Inside the Glacier" in the Alaska journal* Cirque.**

A Story by Adventurers for Adventurers

Marina Parapini

Charles Darwin's main legacy is unquestionably his upheaval of the scientific world with the proposal of evolution and natural selection, but his travels aboard the *Beagle* still inspire anyone with their own sense of wonder and adventure. It was during his trip around the tip of South America and on into the Pacific Ocean that Darwin gathered his data and began to question what had been taken for granted for millenia. *Winter in Fireland: A Patagonian Sailing Adventure* is a narrative that follows in Darwin's wake as Coghlan and his wife, Jenny, set sail from Cape Town, South Africa to Patagonia aboard their twenty-seven-foot sailboat, *Bosun Bird.*



Winter in Fireland: A Patagonian Sailing Adventure
Nicholas Coghlan
University of Alberta Press
2011. 400 p. $34.95

The story begins with Coghlan's memories of being stationed in Buenos Aires as a teacher. Applying for the job was the first of many impulse decisions that eventually led him and his wife around the world. His first chapter, 'Far Away and Long Ago', is the most engaging as it gently weaves personal memories with historical facts and charts a transitional period in Argentina's history. It's during this time that Coghlan and his wife fall in love with the "bright, fierce, and fickle South" and visit Patagonia for the first time. The tale then fast-forwards twenty-five years to the purchase of *Bosun Bird* and their fitting of the vessel as they prepare for the titular adventure. It is a story by adventurers for adventurers. For someone planning their own trip south, this book would be useful as both a beginning resource and for its annotated bibliography that lists several books of sailing around South America. For others it will be an escape into worldly travel urges likely to inspire fantasies of visiting Patagonia for ourselves.

Nicholas and Jenny Coghlan

Coghlan writes with the crisp syntax of a Captain's log and peppers his account with honesty and dry English humour. The strength of the narrative is in the parsimonious and often hilarious descriptions of the many minor characters along the way. The one regret a reader has when finishing is the missed opportunity of becoming better acquainted with Coghlan's wife, Jenny. She is only revealed by snatches of dialogue, but it is enough to suggest not only a pragmatic partner and an able adventurer, but a keen observer with wit of her own.

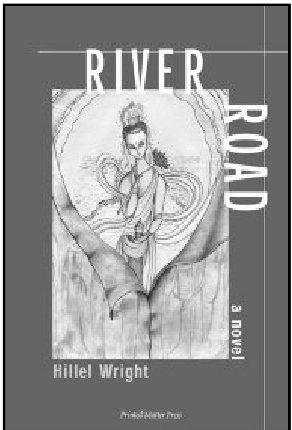
All sailor stories are built on the power of the sea and man's struggle to assert himself against nature. Nature is never so close as when it is trying to kill you; the sublime can only be experienced through the tremble of awe. Stories from the sea are stories of survival: Ishmael recounting the white whale and the ancient Mariner telling of the mysteries that happen out of sight from land. Coghlan reminds us how adventures are measured more by their mishaps than their successes, as well as how the greatest adventurer is often just the luckiest.

Marina Parapini graduated with a B.A.in English and Business and is having her own adventure volunteering in Lome, Togo.

River Road

Martin VanWoudenberg

River Road comes as the much-needed sequel to Hillel Wright's enjoyable *Border Town.* My only complaint with Wright's earlier work was that the story ended too abruptly, and one's investment in the characters demanded more time with them. *River Road* makes good on both counts, presenting us with the continuing adventures of Fumie Akahoshi, her daughter Angelica, and a wide cast of supporting and intersecting characters. As thoroughly engrossing as the first book, it will, however, leave the reader confused if they have not previously read *Border Town.*



River Road
Hillel Wright
Printed Matter
2012. $146 Pages. 15.00

As in the first novel, Wright interweaves plots and influences from popular culture, current events, anime and manga, and Japanese history. In the earlier book, Fumie's fictional illuminations on the use of Chinese "comfort women" by Japanese soldiers hit too close to home and put an assassin on her trail. The closure of that story found Fumie either missing or dead, and the truth of the conspiracy unresolved. Her child Angelica, now newly the inheritor of two spectacular mansions and a host of clues, receives telepathic messages from someone who may be her mother. And so starts her investigation into her mother's work and her disappearance.

Wright established complex genealogical connections in his first book. This time around his narrative is more focused on characters and their actions. However, like *Border Town*, this new work is not a straight-forward narrative. As one of his characters reflects, "Three examples make a pattern." And so begins a seemingly disconnected tale linking encounters in a western-theme bar in Japan, a beggar repairman that dies saving the lives of other homeless people in a flash flood, and a crying girl in a post-tsunami shelter. All serve to weave the threads of the narrative together. It is a process that requires a clear, adroit mind, but the payoff is satisfying. Loose ends are brought together, mysteries are revealed. By the end, we learn the truth about Fumie's fate, the connected destiny of the surfer Jorge Luis, and the connections to Old Man and the Japanese crime families.

Hillel Wright

If there is a weakness in the book, it lies in Wright's thinly-veiled disrespect for his audience. Instead of allowing the strength and oddity of his story to carry the reader along, he stops and interjects frequently, as though to reassure the reader it will all make sense in the end. At one point he uses almost those exact words, asking the "dear reader" to please bear with him, since the payoff is coming. At other junctures, he simply stops the story for an almost-Shakespearean aside that lays out the plot for the reader, then resumes its normal narrative. These breaks are neither needed nor welcome, and they take away some of the fun in arranging these puzzle pieces and connections for oneself. Like a Sudoku puzzle book with half the correct sequences placed in already, the solution process is half the delight.

Perhaps Wright was concerned that his audience would lose patience with the threads and seemingly-random stories he was arranging. He need not have been, espe-

(*continued on page 38)*

Kazin, Perambulating

Richard Wirick

"God is simply the name for our wonder." So says Alfred Kazin in a December 1944 journal entry from this new volume edited by Richard M. Cook. I was long ago apprised of the wonder present in *On Native Grounds* and *A Walker In The City,* which met with critical praise unparalleled in epistolary and diaristic writing. But I ignored the entreaties, just as I ignored the reception given *New York Jew*, whose personal score-settling caused such a stir in the 1980s. Kazin was always one of those critics one had to *get* to, like Wilson, Kermode, and Northrop Frye. He was rumored to be the most accessible, the most peculiarly American, the most optimistic and visionary. A transcendentalist, the heir to Emerson.

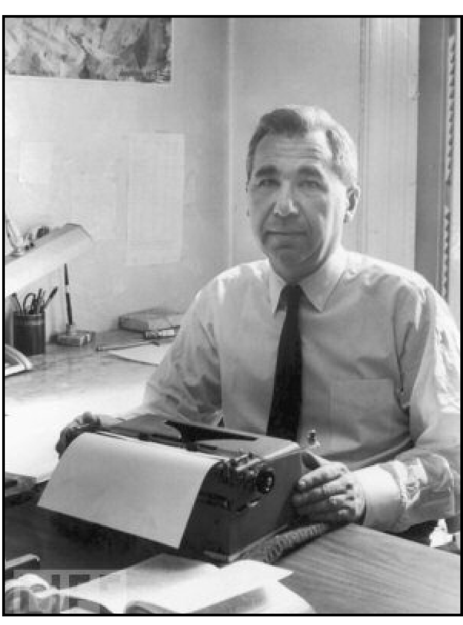
Alfred Kazin's Journals
Yale University Press
Selected and edited by
Richard M. Cook
668 Pages, $27.50 US

So finally, after 35 years, Kazin's *Journals* enabled me to see what all the fuss is about. If Montaigne is correct and memoir differs from autobiography by having an outward focus – being *about* others – then the narrative arc of these five decades of notes is definitely toward memoir. Especially during the politically rich 30s, and having been a Marxist true believer, Kazin's prose falcon-sharp and keen, and he calls his paragraphs back to his fist with snapshots of great figures, ominous social movements and counter –movements, sparks and flashes of insight.

Kazin's 1930s are brimming with political theories and their refutations, eclectic conjectures hatched by the mass man, the oppressed woman, the outraged, marginalized and galvanized minority. Appalled by capitalism's brutality, he trusted Lenin's diligent broom, "sweeping, sweeping it all away," and stayed dazzled enough by socialism's "immanence only in action," its "methods, substance and form… encompassing the highest promise of human life." When Stalin's horrors were revealed and huge segments of the American Left ran for cover, Kazin envisioned a "third group" that would retain the doctrine's essential vision while casting off its police-repressive machinery.

But for all of politics' external tensions, there isn't a paragraph here that doesn't reflect on the essential interiority of writing, its bracing challenges, the sometimes morbid insecurity of its practitioners. And at the same time the awareness of that makes for the magnetic, attractive *tone* of the writer, a mantle he sees coating Proust above all others: "The tyranny o*f love* in him; it fills all the spaces formerly occupied by custom, law, religion. It is the private man's last expression of his finiteness and longing for the infinite. The irony implicit in his own suffering; his awareness of his suffering, of its intrinsic greatness *and* triviality." Kazin saw the writer's loneliness birthed in infancy, the "obsession with childhood" so foregrounded in Joyce and Proust (and Sherwood Anderson), and which gave Kazin the conception and techniques of "personal history" that would underlie his *Walker in the City* (1951).

The success of *Walker* gave him new confidence in his casual assessments, seeing usefulness in every perception and its notation. "Even the most banal and casual observations have purpose," he wrote; journal composition redeems the long string of "days that die so forgotten," he says – it is "pitiful…. Not to save what is unsaveable, but [which can] define what is peculiarly mine." The diaristic impulse constructs personality, bestows coherence, battles back death.


Alfred Kazin

The beauty of Kazin's judgments are that they do not come with the irritable certainty of those of, say, Edmund Wilson, or, as was more common, art critics like Clement Greenberg or John Berger. Kazin had "negative capability," and one sees him questioning his assessments even (like H. James) as he swoops in on a work. His mind is a bird with its wings spread, floating and circling, hovering, questioning its decision; when he settles on his prey the movements of his thought are as subtle as rustling wings.

Yet there is no more forceful personality in the book than the author's, who holds his own with Mailer, Bellow, the young and combative Philip Roth. (All of them craved his approval in the 50s—that tap of his wand, which, in its day, was indispensable to citizenship in the Republic of Letters.) It is his snapshots of these other personalities that are so effortlessly perfect, so balanced and knowing. In his only meeting with T.S. Eliot (a legendary intimidator), Kazin's subject reveals convictions but lets slip pretensions and diffidences, and, once again, that subject's *awareness* of each:

> *He was extremely kind, gentle, spoke very slowly and hesitatingly, livened up a bit when I pushed the conversation to literary topics. He looks like a very sensitive question mark—long, winding and bent; Gives the impression his sensibility is in his long, winding nose. He said things which just verged on "You Americans," but I grinned when he spoke of Truman and Missouri and he grinned back! When I gave him [Harvard philosopher] Professor Spencer's regards, he brightened considerably and asked if I was a Harvard man.*

If I knew his other work better I would say these diaries are a perfect introduction to them. I'll say it anyway.

Richard Wirick appears elsewhere in this issue.

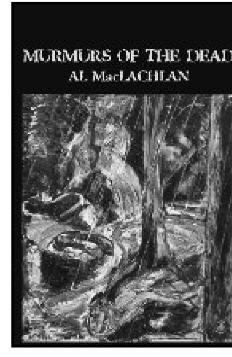
"This is a very good first novel, with plenty of promise. MacLachlan can set action in a place... we have a writer to watch."

Margaret Cannon
Globe and Mail

Ekstasis Noir from Al MacLachlan

ISBN 1-894800-78-8
After the Funeral (fiction)
160 pages, $21.95

In *After the Funeral,* a man wakes up beside the lifeless body of a stranger. He has no memory of his own identity or past. Has there been a murder and is he, in fact, the murderer? In this gripping first novel, Al MacLachlan probes the paranoia that leads to insanity, when everything familiar suddenly becomes strange.



ISBN 978-1-89743-65-1
Murmurs of the Dead (fiction)
288 pages, $24.95

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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Poetry from the Mighty North

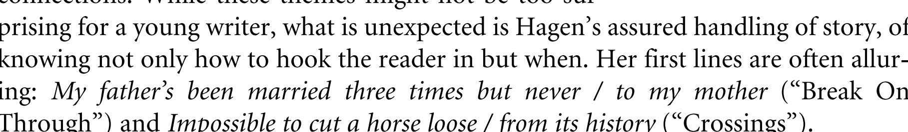
Joanna Lilley

Something is happening in the Yukon. Despite having a population of just 36,000, the territory has produced three poets with first books in as many years. Yukon's capital, Whitehorse, has also now hosted three biennial poetry festivals, bringing major Canadian poets such as Don McKay, bill bissett, Karen Solie and Michael Ondaatje north of the sixtieth parallel. Maybe it's something to do with all that daylight.

Kerosene
Jamella Hagen
Nightwood Editions
2011, 80 p. $18.95

The territory's latest collection is *Kerosene* by Jamella Hagen, published last fall. I don't usually read poetry books straight through; I dip in and out, drawn to a poem's first line or its shape. But when I read the first poem in *Kerosene,* I was compelled to keep reading, much as if I had picked up a novel. Not only is there an unputdownable quality to Hagen's individual poems but I felt a narrative thread leading me through the collection. I simply wanted to know what happened next.

Kerosene is divided into three parts: the poet grows up, she travels, she returns to reconnect and form new connections. While these themes might not be too surprising for a young writer, what is unexpected is Hagen's assured handling of story, of knowing not only how to hook the reader in but when. Her first lines are often alluring: *My father's been married three times but never / to my mother* ("Break On Through") and *Impossible to cut a horse loose / from its history* ("Crossings").



However, I don't want to give the impression that Hagen is more suited to writing fiction than poetry. Her rustic and challenging BC childhood – explored wryly in the collection's first section – doesn't seem to have jaded her perception of nature. Describing willows, she writes: *Only in the seeping ice of winter's end will they / extend a bouquet of small gestures / soft as earlobes, pale as moons* ("Emma and Rosemary").

Jamella Hagen

Hagen has a knack of putting the reader right into Canada's scratchy, soggy, stunning outdoors, to the extent that even when the poet travels to Salar de Uyuni, the world's largest salt flat, the first image is of a prairie.

It is perhaps hard for poets living in any vast, unpopulated region to leave the outdoors aside, a tendency Hagen shares with other Yukon poets including Michael Eden Reynolds, whose first collection, *Slant Room*, was published by The Porcupine's Quill in 2009, and Clea Roberts, author of *Here Is Where We Disembark*, published by Freehand Books in 2010. The Yukon is also home to Erling Friis-Baastad, author of *The Exile House* (Salmon Publishing) and *Wood Spoken: New and Selected Poems* (Harbour Publishing). Hugely respected by the territory's considerable arts community, Friis-Baastad may well be a more fitting literary grandfather for the Yukon than the gold rush bard Robert Service.

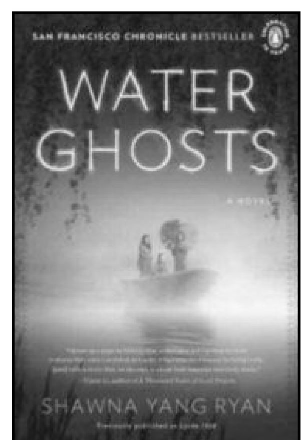
They say things happen in threes but while *Kerosene* is the Yukon's third recent collection, I suspect that not only are new volumes coming from all these poets, but even more northern voices are about to be heard.

***Joanna Lilley lives in Whitehorse, Yukon, where she writes poems and stories and is on the editorial board of the online magazine,* Arctica.**

Water Ghosts

Samantha Marr

From the first line of Shawna Yang Ryan's *Water Ghosts*, a theme of mystery and Chinese mythology pervades this tale set in the immigrant town of Locke, California in 1928. The quiet farming town is suddenly introduced to a piece of history when three women arrive from China, two unknown, the third being Ming Wai, wife of Richard Fong, owner of the local gambling parlour. The presence of the women sparks curiosity in principal characters Corlissa Lee and her daughter Sofia, distracting them from their strained mother-daughter relationship. Ming Wai's arrival especially instills jealousy in Poppy See, a brothel madam, and Chloe Howell, one of her prostitutes: both have had relationships with Fong. As the complicated dynamics between the women unfold, Poppy experiences premonitions that grow stronger in intensity, predicting danger for the townsfolk of Locke.



Water Ghosts
Shawna Yang Ryan
Penguin, 2009
254 p. $28.50 cloth

Ryan's narrative unfolds slowly. Interspersed with flashbacks that enrich each character's individual story, the ripening storyline offers readers an opportunity to sympathize, criticize or empathize with each character in a recollected situation. Yet a haunting sense of the unknown permeates each page, leaving the reader with a constant ache to know more about each character, their histories, as well as of the town itself. It's as if Ryan writes with a secret on the tip of her tongue, and the reader turns each page waiting for it to slip out.

As chaos and uncertainty intertwine each character's life, Ryan's tale unwinds with confidence and calmness even as tension develops between characters: Poppy yearns for Richard, while Richard desires Chloe. Corlissa yearns to understand her daughter, while Sofia needs to understand her place in the community. As we see each character exposed, readers gain insight into the ache each feels – to be loved, understood, or to gain self-understanding; and for Ming Wai, to feel again what once was hers. Each has a different heartbreaking story to tell, and each must struggle with a secret that threatens to overwhelm her.

Shawna Yang Ryan

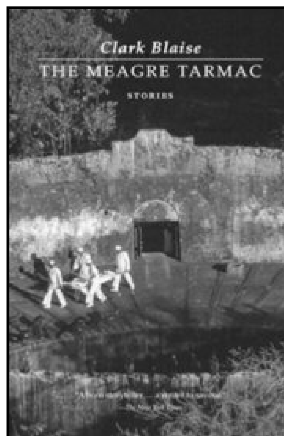
Meanwhile, the townspeople continue trying to figure out why the Chinese strangers have arrived among them. As relationships deepen, confusion grows. Fuelling this is Ryan's choice to use very limited punctuation, which creates a blur of words, thoughts, and narrative. With little distinction made between them, a pervasive sense of ambiguity haunts the work. Whatever the author's reason in this, it does provide a parallel for the mysterious presence of the Chinese women in Locke. Just as we wonder why the women are there, we wonder why the punctuation is not.

With its sense of empowerment projected by the female characters, *Water Ghosts* will appeal to women readers. Navigating a labyrinth of emotional situations between immigrant husbands and wives, mothers and daughters, friends and lovers, humans and ghosts, ultimately it reveals answers to the questions posed by the arrival of the three Chinese strangers. Despite her thick-with-mystery style, Ryan provides roots for the beginnings of the Chinese immigrant community in America, and this is what her novel is really about. Each of her characters symbolizes a different facet of that emerging culture; in their struggles to feel a sense of certainty and self-definition, they prompt reflection into the conflicted nature of humanity: aren't we all looking for something similar?

Samantha Marr writes from Langley, B.C. Soon to graduate from the University of the Fraser Valley, she hopes to pursue graduate studies at Simon Fraser University with the aim of a career in media and publishing.

Passages from India

Christopher Levenson

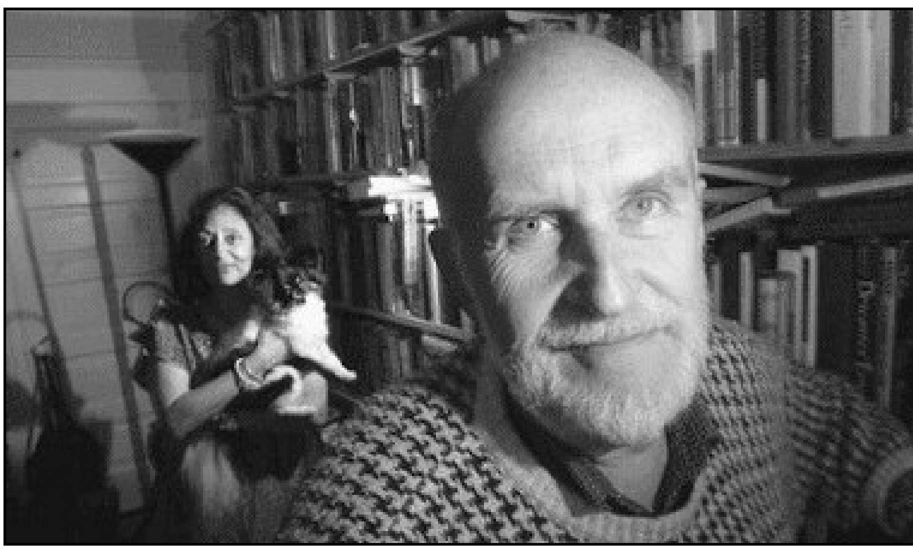


The Meagre Tarmac: stories
Clark Blaise
Biblioasis
2011, 178 pp. $19.95

Ever since Salman Rushdie's 1982 breakthrough novel, *Midnight's Children,* the English-language literature of South Asia has attracted increasing interest and respect in the West, especially now that many of the novelists, such as Vikram Seth, Anita Desai, Amithav Ghosh and Rohinton Mistry spend all or much of their time there. Considering that many such novels explore the conflicts between western *mores* and traditional cultures that result from South Asian immigration to, say, the United States, Canada or the UK, there is clearly a large fictional field to be cultivated.

With the collection of stories *The Meagre Tarmac,* Clark Blaise, presents a double vision of India: not only are the protagonists of these stories, set in the United States or Canada, either Indian or of Indian background, but their author, unlike his wife, Bharati Mukherjee or Jhumpa Lahiri (or, in a Canadian context, Anita Rau Badami or Gurjinder Basran) is not himself Indian but rather, like many of his protagonists, also an outsider. Yet as those who have read *Days and Nights in Calcutta* or *The Sorrow and the Terror,* both of which he co-wrote with Mukherjee, will know, Blaise has shown himself to be a keen observer of the Indian scene, and these interconnected stories are no less insightful.

Although through the reminiscences of his various characters Blaise shows himself well aware of the poverty and squalor of, especially, Calcutta, his protagonists all come from privileged, upper middle class backgrounds, have been educated in English language schools, and have negotiated outwardly successful careers abroad . Socially



Clark Blaise with his wife, Bharati Mukherjee

and financially they have arrived, but they all have secrets and regrets and have made life-draining compromises. Thus the later life of Pronab Das Gupta, protagonist of the last two stories, is haunted by memories of a passionate love affair, supposed to lead to marriage, that was broken off by his father. The young woman leaves suddenly for England, where she marries and later divorces a Muslim man and becomes a leading feminist Labour MP. In London 20 years later, when trying to reconnect, he speaks of wishing to write a memoir, whereupon his erstwhile fiancée recommends a former female colleague, Connie da Cunha. Now a literary agent in Goa and protagonist of one of the book's most over-the- top stories, she already knows his whole life.

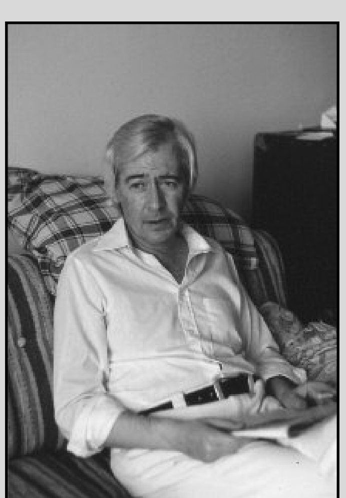
So too with Cyrus Chutneywala, a Parsi, now living in Pittsburgh, who had previously rejected several possible wives as being " plain living, plain thinking, goody-goody schoolteachers, doctors and academics. High in state bureaucracy with secure income. Life with any of them would be one long self-sacrificing commitment to social progress" In the end he has to choose between an Indian-food loving Jewish waitress and a divorced Bollywood actress who, when he visits her in Toronto, is rehearsing a love scene with the gay protagonist of another story.

Both geographically and psychologically then, these stories cover a lot of ground, but thanks to his seemingly effortless appropriation of Indian , and especially Bengali, voices and attitudes, Blaise's fiction allows us not simply to see but to *see through* his characters. We watch as the self-deceptions of sociology professor Vivek Waldekar regarding his supposedly pure and virginal thirteen year old daughter are revealed in the next story from the viewpoint of that daughter, who turns out to be sexually experienced and totally alienated from her parents' traditional Indian values. Likewise the innocence of successful California-based 'dear Abhi', faced with the grasping, materialistic corruption of his extended family back in Calcutta , matches that of his youngest uncle there who has been cheated by, a succession of family members whom he had selflessly helped through many crises. "Not for the first time did it occur to me that poverty corrupts everyone in India just as wealth does the same in America" but , like many of Clark's more successful characters, he too settles for 'well-adjusted' rather than 'happy.' True, none of these contrasts between on the one hand the societal rigours and expectations of ones upbringing, especially the oppressive sense of family, and on the other, the apparently relaxed standards of American society, presents a new theme for South Asian writers but, because Blaise's protagonists, like himself, in his role as commentator are always outsiders, exceptions to the rule, he manages them with particular finesse and is free also to critique western misconceptions as in ,say: 'It's my experience that Indian men,, afraid to press their opinions or exert their presence, are often perceived as soulful'. In short, these stories are finely textured, nuanced, and complex in their understanding of the provisional and the transitional in eternal conflict with the rigid but welcome certainties of traditions. Indeed, perhaps the major success of such fictions is precisely to keep us off balance, undecided or ambivalent.

***Christopher Levenson's reviews have appeared in many journals. He has published several books of poetry and is the co-founder of* Arc.**

Remembering John Newlove

a poem by Len Gasparini



John Newlove

Twice I met poet John Newlove.
The first time was in Toronto, at M&S.
He sat at his desk
in a nondescript room
messy with mss.,
looking grave but well dressed;
a young editor blest
with the curse of verse.
I had mailed him some poems.
Both of us knew that crabgrass grew
on the foothills of Parnassus.
His smile was a simile.
The second time was in Saskatoon,
in his hotel room, the morning after
a League of Canadian Poets party.
He looked a mess—other than how he saw himself
in his poetry, which reminded him how hard it was
to remain just one person.
He inscribed *The Fat Man* and backhanded it
to me, the gesture aggressive.
I caught it in midair. Was he wondering
who'd win in a fight?
Poetry that takes you to the edge,
then gives you a shove.

Len Gasparini is the author of numerous books of poetry and five short-story collections, including* When Does a Kiss Become a Bite? *(Ekstasis) and* The Snows of Yesteryear *(Guernica).

A Brazilian Incarnation:

Bill Dodd

Rain, naturally, like love, is a real beneficence to those on whom it seasonally falls—but love, when it runs the possible gamut of human emotions, and cries out its implied mission is no less than verbal cosmic detonation, becomes a thing unto itself, regardless how entwined with its object of devotion. Such a singular “love” is, at least, the theme that runs throughout Bill Pearlman’s *magnum opus, Brazilian Incarnation.*

A Brazilian Incarnation: New and Selected Poems 1967-2004
Bill Pearlman
Rough Road Press

I only wanted
to be here on the earth
with you held
in a fresh dance
(p. 106)

he writes in “Cleopatra On The Verge,”

Sad bird. Distress
at so much that didn’t go well,
so much that fell apart.
I did want you so much
and then could not have you.
My thirst was endless,
my heart clouded with hopes.
(p. 107)

…Eros was our dark god
and we wanted so much to merge
forces of the living state
we almost stood within
(p. 109)

I am broken by all this
…wanting…
…just to be in the company of love
…I simply gave way
to something so utterly wild,
so crazily swept with pure indulgence
I could not help myself.
(p. 110)

He writes, near the end of the poem:

We needed to start further down
where there is simply yearning.
Where the part of the psyche less grandiose
comes through. Where a poor desire
stems the tide of all this
ecstasy and dominion,
world-conquest in exalted flesh.
(p. 111)

Well, while it is ostensibly Cleopatra addressing Antony, the voice of the poet is not to be denied. Here, in his own words, from the introduction on the back of his book of poetry is his explanation: “These poems were born of the borrowed insistence that what psychoanalysis calls the ‘object’ is more than an illusion, that she is the emphasis that makes the poems work. But on the other hand, since the muse seems to take many forms, perhaps the crunch time of desire is to realize that you must wrench the energy away from the ‘object’ and live with your own protracted subjectivity.” Here the poetic ambition is defined.

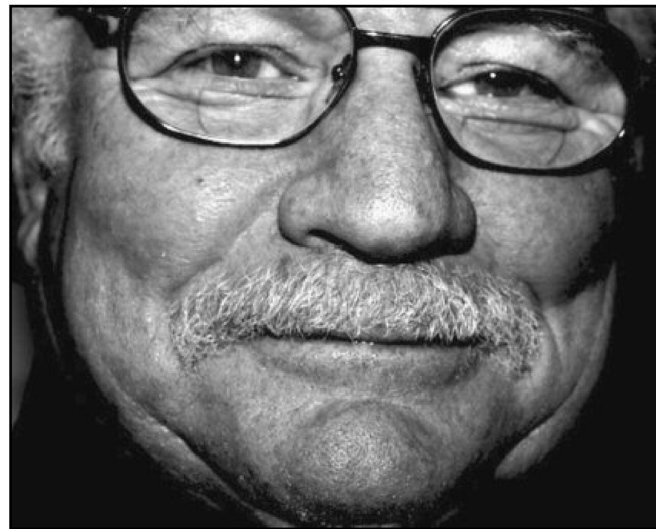
In his vision there is, at least, a metaphoric “world conquest” within the improbable human confines of love.

Not to imply love in the book is anywhere abstract, i.e., not “real” love. In “Cleopatra,” while it is a poem based on literary allusion, at the book’s beginning a “real” love affair is charted throughout the country of Brazil; hence, of course, the book’s title.

Something is shooting up in us—
the pool is green again,
the light endless
and yet there is everywhere
even in this midst of human voices
a shawl she wore overall,
a piece of history unadorned
and wanting to fill space.
…Seeds that were planted
…now stand disciplined in forests
…& the human body resurrects plentitude
and there is harvest fury.
(from “Agua Mineral,” p. 60)

On the next page, he writes:

I gave you my still laughing tale
and you embraced my domain,
all preconceptions I might have
about your hurrying light;
You were the evanescent pure
hypothesis of joy
and I loved you with a force goes further
than mere touching. This
was a great occasion for romance & mystery
for the driven shape of outrageous acts,
for this certain scope of so many hours
holding close the beauty and the dance


Bill Pearlman

And so it continues. A kind of dervish of erotic reiteration that finally suggests a gestalt,a satori, of lingua amore solely designed to capture the earthly enigma of our transitory corporeity in its effulgent expression on a canvas of the eternal, the transcendent.

Such a singularity of this voice is an appeal consistent throughout the book (251 pp.), making more of a whole cloth of the collection, like breaths in a chain-of-being.

It represents an unusual, singular accomplishment; and one that requires such an intense and on-going focus that there can be no doubt as to its integrity; it bespeaks one who has dedicated himself to his vision for an indefinite period of his life.

“Would I were heaven,” he invokes near the end of the book. Perhaps, one ponders, this is really what his writing is about: to bring us a taste of what (his) heaven is, would be, was. And he says clearly:

These songs I make I make as one who blames &
blesses the insistent heart that beats a billion
times told lovelier spearing the sanctuary so bright
the entrance, the wine flowing in the bittersweet
logarithm straying up back until one espies the
solid ground of things beginning Inzorbital firing
ceremoniously into its own rare ellipse, beautifying
round the careening appetite, dashing to breathe
deliberate warmth touching
(p. 230)

PEARLMAN (*continued on page 38*)

PEARLMAN (*continued from page 37*)

The earlier (younger) poems (1967-2004) are nearer the end of the book. He shares several really "personal" moments out of his love of athletics and athletes—very much in the Grecian tradition—in his poems about Steve Prefontaine's running in Eugene in the early '70s. I fault him only for failing to mention Dave Wottle's outkicking Pre in one of those pre-Olympic events. In all seriousness, however, these poems, while still intense, do open a window to a "younger" poet still testing for his voice, as we duly note such intensity only compounds as he advances in years.

Perhaps some small biographical note is necessary to shed light on what is a classic piece of American literature. Bill Pearlman grew up in Manhattan Beach, CA; his father was a famous, early beach volleyball player there, and Bill was a "jock." Injured young, while playing linebacker at UCLA, it has always appeared to me he took that great strength he possessed as a somewhat undersized linebacker and used it to introduce himself to the emerging psychedelic world of the early '60s.

There is no attempt in the book made to masquerade the fact much of its imagery derives from the psychedelic experience transcribed into its own unique poetic idiom.

At any rate, from this point-of-view, his early athletic experience was invaluable in not only surviving the Vietnam years but to his earned development as a writer. With such survival should come maturity both as a person and artist, and so it is in Pearlman's case.

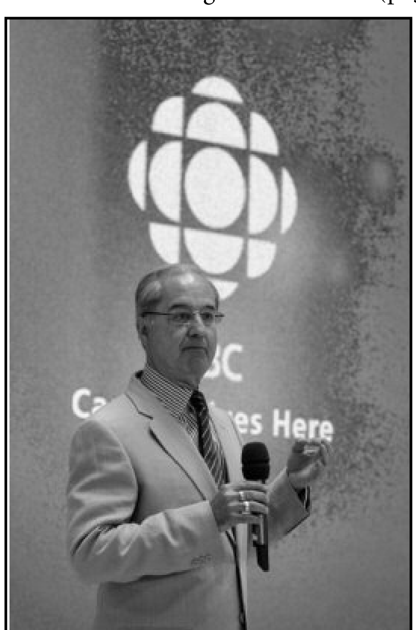
I strongly urge anyone who hopes to understand if there is another definitive level of development in the continuing history of contemporary American literature to obtain this book—and read it with the marveling that is sure to come.

Bill Dodd was an American poet and longtime essayist on subjects far and wide. He died unexpectedly in 2009, and is survived by his wife Dorothy and son, James, daughter Creeley, and son Quin. He published several volumes of poetry, including Stoked Plains, June Christmas in Wales and In October Before the War.

STURSBERG (*continued from page 26*)

reluctance to compromise upset the Board of Directors as well as the President, Hubert Lacroix. Ultimately, in 2010, the latter dismisses Stursberg, telling him "We are parting ways." (Stursberg's response: "Really. Are you leaving?")

Stursberg's style is effortless to read, and even lyrical on occasion. His depictions of people around him are frank and not always charitable. Indeed, I felt that the book was so revealing that Stursberg was forfeiting the chance of ever being rehired by the CBC or any other organization protective of its inner manoeuvrings. Other corporate memoirs sometimes disappoint, as they rehash issues already covered in the press. In *The Tower of Babble*, however, Stursberg follows his own adage for effective journalism, "Tell me something I don't know" (p. 320). Indeed, I felt that I was let in on corporate secrets – so much strategizing is laid open to the reader's scrutiny. For instance, in negotiating with the National Hockey League in 2006, Stursberg emphasizes how essential it is for the CBC to retain its rights to professional hockey. He explains how losing them would mean the disappearance of millions in ad revenue plus the need to commission hours of expensive programming to replace the missing hockey matches. Yet the negotiations occur at a surprisingly informal level, with Stursberg, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and a very few others deliberating for hours in posh restaurants in New York City and elsewhere.



Critics will say that Stursberg's vision for the public broadcaster is inappropriate. He favours Canadian content, but he is not supportive enough of public broadcasting's potential for promoting challenging and elevating fare as an alternative to the consumerist pandering of the private broadcasters. In this regard, for instance, he speaks favourably of Kevin O'Leary, he of *Dragon's Den* and *The Lang and O'Leary Exchange*, a personality better suited to the right-wing Sun News Network than to the CBC. Nevertheless, I enjoyed the book. As I read along, I was curious to find out who Stursberg would disturb next, while feeling that I was learning much about the inner workings of the CBC.

Eric Spalding writes from British Columbia's Fraser Valley where he teaches Communications and Media Studies. He is a regular contribtutor to The Pacific Rim Review of Books

VILLEMAIRE (*continued from page 7*)

Little Red Berries, a more fulsome novel, still impressionistic but having the gravitas of a more mature narrator, appeared before *India, India,* which may have been an afterthought cadenza intended to kick start the emotionally arrested Miliana.

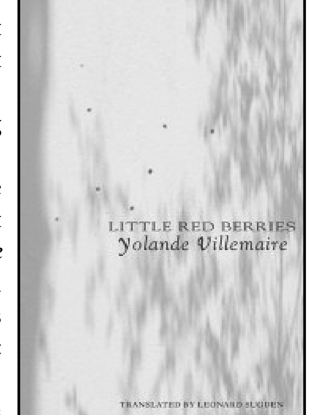
In *Little Red Berries*, the narrator Solange (alternately Solo) walks through the minefield of a genetically cursed family. When her cousin/guardian is diagnosed with schizophrenia in late adolescence, Solange is left to discern the difference between delusional and empirical realities as she sorts out the meaning of sanity and madness.

> *A shadow emerges from my body, approaches the platform and leaps in front of the train. Another one follows, then another - the movement fades away before my eyes and I anticipate following onto the rails myself. At the very last second, I call the shadows back. They rejoin my body: it hasn't budged.*

What makes Solange a more redemptive character than Miliana is her scholarly absorption in Quebecois literature, the work that takes her sympathies beyond herself. Miliana has a child to expand her parameters, but she fails to see her daughter Atalanta as anything more than an extension of herself. Hers is an I rather than a We universe. Solange the teacher's objective is to sympathize and break out of the deaf world where she was incubated.

> *I was trapped inside my inner world, pierced by waves of neutrinos emerging from the darkness of time, a distant solar storm, which, by some chance happening, had just reached me.*

Novelist Carol Shields used to say that the best characters define themselves by their work. That is not to say they lack interior lives, but community is not created by introversion. Miliana's art is possibly nothing more than a child's attempt to get her mother's attention, and that is not enough. When Villemaire twists the androgynous *Cirque du Soleil* acrobat/contortionist Ambroisine from Miliana's story into the plot of *Little Red Berries*, she affirms the function of coincidence in human interaction. If Solange is a witness, Ambroisine is a catalyst. They are both part of an ongoing dialectic process.



Little Red Berries

Men, metaphorical and otherwise, fail Solange as they failed historical Quebec; and the women still have subservience in their genetic memory, no matter what the feminist rhetoric proclaims. What men and women alike are left with is the creative activity of child's play, the poetry, art and music that is the soul of a colony that continues to colonize itself.

Her translator, given the task of presenting the rhetorical/ self-referential style of modern French and Italian writing to readers in English with barely a bump (apart from the sexual kind), dials back the hyperbole, making her lateral pastiche accessible to a more literal Anglophone audience, so they too can taste the redemption offered by little red berries, the beauty that persists season after season. This secular sacrament is the connection between the unreconciled polarities of a new Quebecois social and cultural order. Beauty is still the only truth.

Linda Rogers, currently short-listed for the Exile/ Carter Vanderbilt Cooper short story award, has dinner with Anderson Cooper on her bucket list.

RIVER ROAD (*continued from page 33*)

cially for a second book in a series. If we have come this far with him, we are not predisposed to bailing out now. His skill at crafting those mysteries and interjecting unique characterizations is sufficient to render such hand-holding obligations in the text unnecessary. Once I got a few pages in, he had me completely.

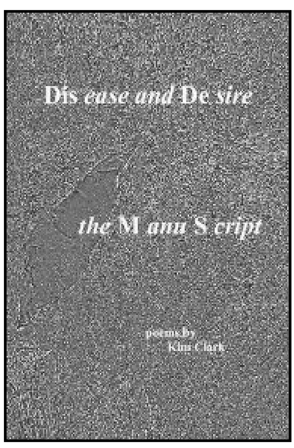
River Road is a book that makes good on all the hints and intrigues suggested in *Border Town.* As a concluding sequel it brings some unnecessary training wheels, but provides a great ride through the slightly-askew world Wright has created. For those who have read *Border Town*, Wright's latest is a natural. For those who haven't it is likely prudent and delightful to recommend them as a pair.

An author and educator, Martin VanWoudenberg has published three books. A regular contributor to PRRB, he lives in Abbotsford, B.C. with his wife and four children.

Dis *ease* and De *sire*

Linda Crosfield

Reading Kim Clark is a little like turning compost. There's dirt. There are worms. And the deeper you dig, the richer it gets. The Nanaimo poet and fiction writer isn't above inventing new words where old ones won't quite do. In Dis *ease* and De *sire*—the M *anu* S *cript*, her new chapbook with the striking mottled red cover from Lipstick Press, you'll find words like "starvatious", and the title of her first collection of short stories, published in 2011 by Caitlin Press, is *Attemptations*.



Dis ease *and De* sire—
the M anu S cript
Kim Clark
Lipstick Press
2012, 28 pages, $10

The MS in this chapbook is Multiple Sclerosis, and she writes about it from an intimate vantage point; she has it, and in Clark it's found a formidable opponent. She writes with objectivity, humour and perception, as in the last lines of "Ghost of a spider poem":

> *the trouble with tender*
> *is the small word contained there*
> *enveloped in empty letters.*

In "Lacuna" Clark brings you to a pub for some *laughter, banter/easy discourse*, then hauls you out of both your chair and your complacency to cross the room to the bathroom with her, cane and deadwood leg notwithstanding.

She uses rhyme just sparingly enough for it to pack a serious punch when you encounter it, never more so than in "Nerve", with its Batman BLAM! POW! ZONK! BANG! WHAM! stanza introductions and this, from the first one:

> *now it's my nerves that blur me—*
> *multiple scarring of my nerves,*
> *black holes in my MRI brain,*
> *message interrupt-us,*
> *relentless sclerosis*
> *a mess*
> *MS.*

I read an earlier version of "Nerve" in 2005 at the Victoria School of Writing where I met Clark in one of the summer poetry workshops. More importantly, I remembered the poem, for the clear, simple, devastating way she plays with sounds—*interrupt-us/sclerosis/mess/MS*.

Erin Morgenstern

"Night bloom" is a deft riff on the way air feels on bare skin: *inciting the bloom/of a quicksilver shiver/to spread its long fingers.* I spent an inordinate amount of time over several readings trying to decide if "Night bloom" needed the one-word line it ends with that serves to provide information already presented, beautifully and precisely, in the poem. A minor quibble, but I thought it could end with *savour brief thrill/of sensation*, which led to a spirited what-are-you-doing-I'm-writing-about-a-word discussion with my husband. (He liked it). And while I'm being picky, Clark's use of brackets can be distracting, as in "Untitled":

> *a series of walking dreams*
> *brings my body back to me*
> *the distant fog*
> *the darkness beyond*
> *run poor interference*
> *it would be too beautiful*
> *a thing to capture*
> *record, slow mo   tion*
>
> *step away [hint]*
> *memorize*
> *alive.*

Kim Clark, writes the kind of poetry you keep tasting to see if it's really as good as you thought, and it is. Her poetry (as well as her fiction) combines playfulness with sensuality, mixing the serious and wistful in a way that invokes pondering and challenges the reader. To borrow a phrase from "Nerve", if you're *voracious starvatious* for more of her poems, you're in luck. A new book, "Sit You Waiting" from Caitlin Press, comes out this fall. Visit Kim Clark online at www.kimclarkwriter.com.

***Linda Crosfield makes books and writes poetry in Ootischenia, BC. She was featured poet in the spring 2012* New Orphic Review.**

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Annick Perrot-Bishop is a Francophone Canadian author of multicultural background (Vietnamese, Indian and French). A resident of St. John's, Newfoundland, she has published some sixty short stories and translations in literary journals and anthologies as well as five books. *In Long, Secret Rivers* is Neil Bishop's translation of Annick Perrot-Bishop's *En longues rivières cachées*, a translation for which he won First Prize in the prestigious John Dryden Translation Competition (2008), organized by the British Comparative Literature Association and the British Centre for Literary Translation.

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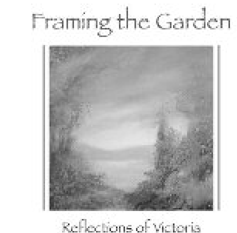

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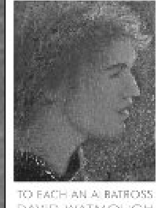

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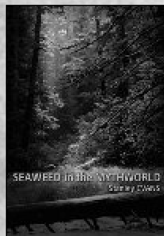

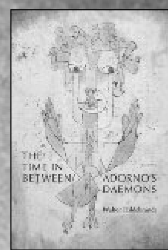

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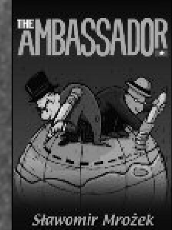

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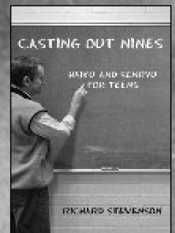

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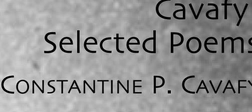

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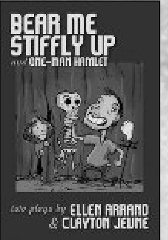

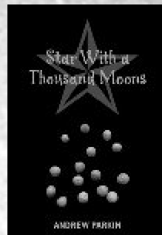

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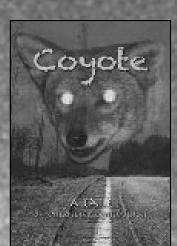

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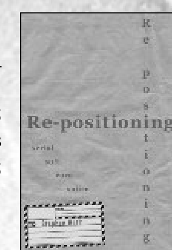

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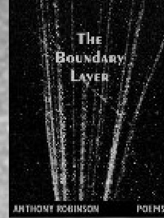

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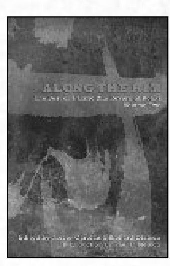

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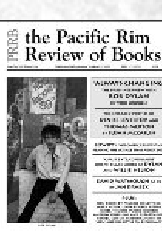

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