

PRRB the Pacific Rim Review of Books

Issue Twenty-Three Vol. 12, No. 1

Publication Mail Agreement Number 41235032

ISSN 1715-3700

\$5.95



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RIVER TREATY

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PRRB

Pacific Rim Review of Books

Issue Twenty-Three Vol. 12 No. 1 Spring 2018
ISSN 1715-3700 Publication Mail Agreement Number 4123503

Published by Pacific Rim Review of Books Ltd.
Publisher/Editor: Richard Olafson
Managing Editor: Carol Ann Sokoloff
International Editor: Trevor Carolan
Music Editor: Joseph Blake
Medical Editor: Dr. Nicolas Kats
Circulation manager: Bernard Gastel
Contributing editors: Jordan Zinovich (New York), klipschutz (San Francisco), Richard Wirick (Los Angeles), Paul Nelson (Seattle), Gregory Dunne (Japan), Antonio D'Alfonso (Montreal), Peter McCambridge (Quebec), Carol Ann Sokoloff (Victoria), Linda Rogers (Victoria), Harold Rhenisch (Vernon), Anna Aublet (Paris).

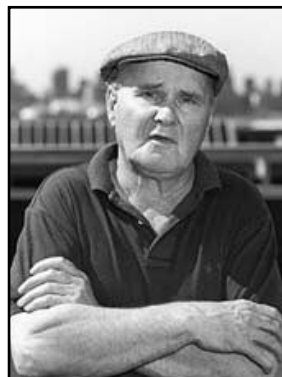
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The PRRB is published three times a year. Back issues are available at \$6.00. A one-year subscription in Canada is \$15.00 plus GST. Please send a cheque payable to the PRRB.

PRRB mailing address for all inquiries:
Box 8474 Main Postal Outlet
Victoria, B.C., Canada V8W 3S1
email: editor@prrb.ca
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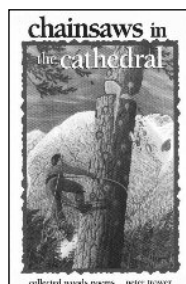
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This issue of the
Pacific Rim Review of Books
is dedicated to the memory of
Peter Trower
(1930-2017)

A great friend and author,
he will be missed.



Chainsaws in the Cathedral: Collected Woods Poems
Ekstasis Editions



Hellhound on His Trail & Other Stories
Ekstasis Editions

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HABITATION: SAM HAMILL COLLECTED

Charles Potts

At six hundred pages, one poem after another, in some apparent approximation of chronological order, and with no section breaks or indication which if any of Hamill's previous books the poems were collected from, or if they are published here for the first time, a reader is presented with a long string of consciousness that varies little and doesn't present any requisite dynamic development. In fact the poet seems to be altogether too conscious of what he is writing with very little sense of the unconscious, mystical, musical breakthrough which gives poetry one of its essential qualities. It often feels as if one is reading the same poem over again.

Hamill's frequent modus operandi is to begin a poem by setting a scene, often starkly realized and concrete in detail. The chief purpose of this scene making device, usually with the initial stanza or poetic paragraph is to create a backdrop for a pose. See the poet in his garden, on the beach, at a café, troubled by the nature of things and his position in them. When the going gets thin, he conjures up what he considers to be his poetic antecedents, Du Fu, George Seferis, Kenneth Rexroth, and several dozen others, more famous names than you'd care to hear recited. This name drop soup, the great poets of the past with Hamill mugging for the camera, is often all that the work contains. "Summer Rain" is a good example of this literary echo chamber:

Kotaro duly noted, his echo
Of Han Shan's echo of Lao Tzu,
And hundreds of years between.

Without actually counting it is likely that somewhere between a third and forty-five percent of the poems follow this template.

There are several finely realized lyrics of brief duration: for example, "A Visitation," "Nagasaki Horses," "Black Marsh Eclogue," "Cooking," "The Goldfinch," and "Of Cascadia."

Late in his life and recently as the American empire began its senseless war on abstract nouns, terrorism and terrorists, Hamill became a worthy leader of poets against the war. His complaints about the fascist in the White House, George W. Bush, and the general slaughter don't add up to enough convincing poetry. There is no sense of the pounding terror of Robert Duncan in *Bending the Bow* for instance and most of the opinions and sensations reported are ordinary and predictable. "Southern Stars" is the best of its kind and after reciting the names of some of Bush's cabinet he writes:

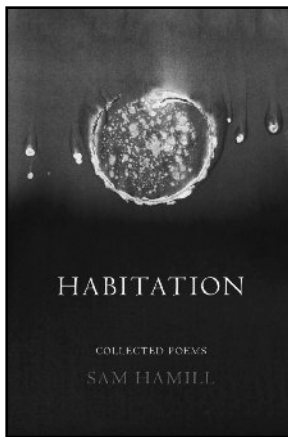
Criminals are the authors of our history.
The worst of evils lies in their impunity.

Combining the anti-war motif with the scene setting as described above, there is an especially lengthy and forgettable treatise called "A Pisan Canto" where Ezra Pound plays the role of a leitmotif. To be evenhanded, this poem is quite similar to many of Pound's *Cantos*: tedious, preachy, irrelevant. It is quaint to refer to Pound as "Old Ez." Using the diminutive "Charlie" referring to Charles Olson is genuinely inappropriate.

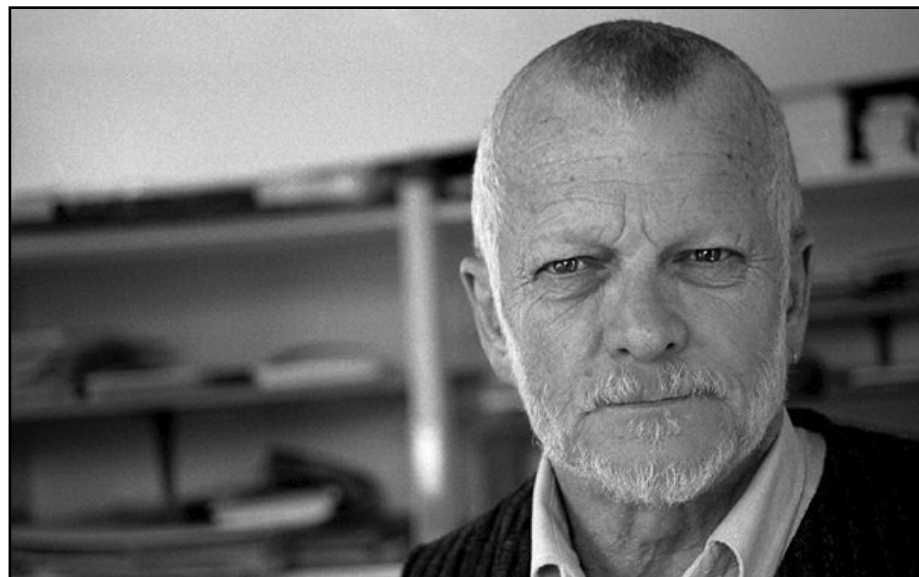
Hamill frequently refers to himself as a fool, and either one has to take him literally or scoff at the false modesty. It is a literary conceit, a pose like many others. Fools are best left in the impoverished hands of the composers of bad country music. There are several attempts to associate the game of golf with Zen. I hope this isn't true but I know nothing of golf that I haven't read in newspapers and I quit suffering any Zen lack many decades ago after finishing D. T. Suzuki and Alan Watts.

The work is riddled with clichés, endings are too frequently platitudinous, and if running onto Du Fu's name on every seventh or eighth page is what you are looking for then this book is for you. There is a danger to Hamill of citing so often this great poet who has been his lifetime literary companion. An astute reader may likely turn to the aforesaid great poet and abandon the author.

Speaking of clichés, anybody reading this been recently "moved almost to tears"?



Habitation: Collected Poems
Sam Hamill
600 pages, Lost Horse Press, 2014



Sam Hamill

Hamill has been, many times apparently. In "Lives of a Poet: Four Letters to Hayden Carruth," we hear about "Wily Su Tung-p'o" and before that third letter is completed, "You, like Su Tung-p'o, are a master, a wily/old fox...!" The wily fox has been a hackneyed reference at least since Aesop. Mentioning the names of many great poets doesn't make the work they are named in great poetry. There are a lot of epistles here, a classical stance of the poem in the form of a letter. In fact the book commences with a letter to Han Shan, (not that he will ever receive it). Writing letters to or dedicating poems to some relatively famous poet (dead or alive), can be a feeble attempt to strengthen an otherwise unremarkable poem.

"Sheep to Slaughter" contains several of Hamill's limitations in one place. It even begins with the word "Like" as if we were in a non-Heraclitian world where things were like one another and not distinct and worthy of notice on their own merits. And it occurs again in the poem. Charles Olson was correct to try to bat similes out of poetry as a "bird that comes down too easily." Harry Shaw's *Dictionary of Literary Terms* asserts that similes are essential to all poetry. I doubt it. There are several "or"s in this poem, a sure leak to let the air out of the poem's penumbra. As if the poet was on a fishing trip, unable to decide on something to say and reverts to providing alternatives. Fatal. The last line of the poem doesn't seem to bear any relation to what has preceded it, an empty platitude in place of a strong ending with a flourish. Like and or drain poems of force and focus.

"Destination Zero" may be the strongest work in the book. Certainly the emotional resonance in its second section is undeniable. A written close reading of this fifteen page poem in six sections would be valuable. The signifier is the mockingbird, mentioned many times, and "elemental emptiness within," itself an echo of emptiness within and without from the previous poem titled simply "Abstract." The opening tone is morose and dour. There is an amusing and accurate delineation of the Protestant churches and the banks: "Banks and churches cherish firstness," Hamill writes. First Unitarian, First National, they are first to pick our pockets, first to mislead us to a non-existent heaven. "Lastness is my way," Hamill says, repeating the lastness from a few lines previous. There is a useful repetition with development. The poet is finding his musical voice. He is in north Texas, Mulberry, Texas, with another mockingbird and the state bird of Texas, the Cardinal, but he emphasizes the mockingbird, and the coyote, who are to show him the way.

Section II is funereal, the burial of his adoptive mother, and his overwhelming "refuse to forget," the lies she told him and the terror she put him through:

My name was Arthur Brown
when first she lied to me—
for my own good, she always said—
driving me "home"
from the orphanage
to see my father and my dog.

(continued on page 6)

THE HIDDEN MASTER: GEORGE DOWDEN

Gerald Nicosia

The difficulty of my writing about George Dowden, or Kaviraj George Dowden, as he preferred to be called in the last decades of his life, is as if I were one of maybe 100 people who knew who Walt Whitman was, and I were suddenly called upon to let the world know the greatness of Whitman's writing when most people were still at the stage of asking, "Walt who?"

George Dowden liked to imagine that he was a sort of direct literary and spiritual descendant of Whitman. He once even climbed into Whitman's bed at the Whitman House in Camden, New Jersey, when the docent wasn't looking! It is impossible to write about Dowden without getting at least a little bit into his craziness—but great geniuses are often crazy, and George was, for my money, an original literary genius of the highest order. But he was often taken as a poseur because of all the mannerisms and what sometimes seemed like affectations—the orange Hindu robes, the swami's full beard, the Hindu pendants and charms worn around his neck, and so forth. If you visited his fifth-floor walk-up apartment on the strand in Brighton, a notoriously countercultural English seaside town, you would get an even bigger dose of these mannerisms. His orange cushion and his Kavirajini's (wife's) cushion were set side by side, and a visitor's cushion set across from them, with carefully arranged stacks of manuscripts between them. If a visitor dared to try to sit somewhere other than his appointed place, he could encounter George's fierce wrath; and I knew at least one Scots poet who, after getting chewed out by George for disobeying the house rules, got turned off to both George and his work, and ceased to be the champion of George's poetry that he had previously been.

But think for a moment of Oscar Wilde, draped in cape, frock coat, feathered hat, green chrysanthemum and all sorts of effeminate jewelry. Hardly has any man, whether literary artist or flaming Hollywood drag queen, met the world with more affected armor than Wilde. Yet Wilde delivered the goods—he gave us great writings that will live forever, and so we forgive the affectations. And George too has left an enormous body of work, much of it of the highest caliber of writing. The only difference, again, is that Wilde's work is fully accessible to the world—people read it, react to it, or (in the case of the plays) perform it every day—so the recognition of his genius grows ever wider. Much of George's work was self-published, and the rest of it appeared from small literary presses or in little magazines. And George made no effort to springboard a career from that—as some writers have done. A little before the age of 40, George went to India, joined the ashram of the famed guru Muktananda, and had his *kundalini* awakened. From that point on, though George wrote ceaselessly and with great dedication till the time of his death at age 82 (in 2014), the whole thrust of his life was a retreat from fame, commercial success, or even professional recognition.

The result is that George left us 28 major books, an unknown number of small chapbooks, and many poems and other writings scattered throughout the literary journals; but the job of finding any of these works, if you don't know where to look, can be as difficult as setting out to find your own goldmine.

It's time to give a little human biographical background to this intentionally self-created, semi-mythical being, "the Kaviraj." Born September 15, 1932, in Philadelphia, to parents of Irish and French-Canadian ancestry, George Dowden took his first hard blow from life when he was five years old. His father died from a failed gall bladder operation, and his destitute mother had trouble supporting him and his younger brother Donald. Just before George turned seven, she placed him in Girard College, the world's largest orphanage for fatherless boys. It was supposedly also a military-style orphanage, and the imprint of George's ten years there were on him all his life. There was so much about him that was instantly comprehensible when one knew of his coming of age in that orphanage: his identity as a loner; his deep need for love, for human contact, and at the same time a profound distrust of anyone getting too close to him; his seeking joy inside himself, through reading, observation, meditation, all the things that a harsh, iron-fisted environment couldn't take from him; his anger at authority and at anyone who frustrated his needs and longings; his deep-seated need to challenge authority; his tenderness toward those who were in any way hurt or oppressed; and, perhaps most of all, his love of nature and natural beauty, the whole world and universe that was beyond man's petty control.

George got out of the orphanage as soon as he could. In 1950, at the age of 17, he joined the Navy and served for 3 years, traveling round the world and losing his virginity, he claimed, to a prostitute in Oran, North Africa. He also used those years to read mightily, an activity he would do all his life. When he got out of the Navy in 1953, he had read enough of Walt Whitman, William Blake, Charles Baudelaire, and Henry David Thoreau to know that he wanted to become a writer himself. Five-foot-nine, dark-haired, strongly-built, and handsome, he had a lot of the gifts it takes to become a success in life, but he was also still deeply angry, had trouble relating to most people, and found that no matter where he went he did not fit in well. But apparently someone advised him that to become a writer he should start by getting a degree in English. He used the GI Bill to pay for his way through Bucknell University in central Pennsylvania, 1953-57, majoring in English.

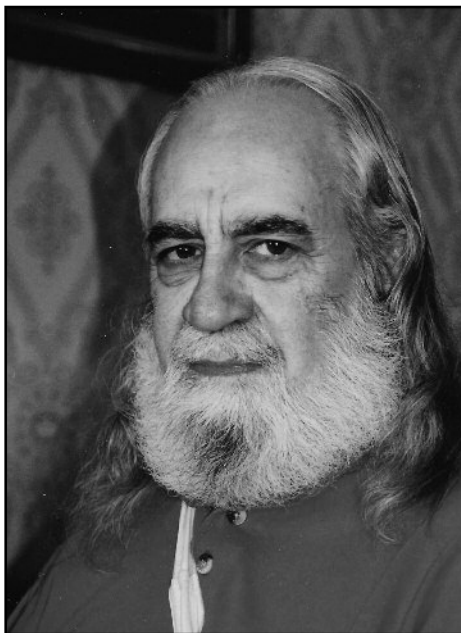
Little is known about Dowden's four years at Bucknell. Like many writers and artists who create an iconic identity—from Jack Kerouac to Whitman himself—Dowden highlighted certain areas of his past, and kept other areas in darkness. We get glimpses in a few of his poems. In "Ah!" he refers to himself as a "college soccer star and boxer." It makes sense considering the athletic build he had for much of his life. Again like Kerouac, he always reveled in his physical body as much as he did in his intellect. But as for career goal, considering the unlikelihood of earning a living as a writer, he figured he would have to become a college teacher; and following Bucknell, he applied to NYU to get his master's degree.

But 1957, the year he got out of Bucknell, was a magical year for a healthy, good-looking, red-blooded young American male with an interest in the literary arts. The Beats had just burst upon the scene—Allen Ginsberg had just won his obscenity trial for *Howl*, and even more exciting, Jack Kerouac's best-seller *On the Road* showed would-be writers like Dowden that there was another, entirely different, viable form of living and writing outside of academia. Dowden fell in love with the work of both of them, as he would later love almost every one of the Beats, including William Burroughs, as they appeared in print—Burroughs, especially, for the poetry of his language and courage to experiment. Dowden began teaching college literature classes to support his way through NYU, and he was probably the first professor in America to teach the Beat writers in a college classroom. That he did so completely without the knowledge or permission of the administrators at NYU shows that he was already far along in forging the role of rebel, outsider, and wild card that, a few years later and with the help of his Indian guru Muktananda, he would spiritualize into the persona of the "Kaviraj."

We have only brief glimpses of Dowden in his late twenties. By all accounts, he was a voracious reader, and had added writers like Robert Burns, Dylan Thomas, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Louis-Ferdinand Celine to the large stock of authors he loved, and from which he could often quote by heart. No surprise, then, that he sought to supplement his income as a part-time teacher with work as an editor at McGraw-Hill in New York City. It was there, in mid 1959, that we get our next glimpse of him, because he proposed marriage to a young woman editor named Nancy Angela Trifari.

The very innocent graduate of a Catholic girls' college, Nancy continually refused his invitations to start dating; but it wasn't because he looked or acted like a beatnik. Far from it, he dressed well and always approached her in a respectful, courteous manner—so much so, that she finally agreed to take lunchtime walks with him discussing literature and philosophy. He told her of his painful upbringing in the orphanage, and of his deepest desires, especially his greatest hope: to become an iconic American poet like Whitman. Because she seemed skeptical about his goal to become a great poet, he wrote her a poem for her 22nd birthday on July 20th, 1959, and read the poem aloud to her standing next to her desk. Aimed directly at her in his deep, resonant voice, the poem bowled her over, and she knew then that he *was* a poet. But she had a teaching job in New Jersey awaiting her in late August, and she quit her McGraw-Hill job to go to it. They wrote to each other frequently and continued to arrange to see each other.

But George did have a different life than that of the courtly, well-groomed young editor. By night he roamed the Village, drinking, sometimes smoking pot, and seeking out the company of Beat artists and writers, with whom he felt most at home. He did



George Dowden

not share much of this with Nancy, but she may have intuited it; because when he proposed marriage to her in September, she turned him down. She told him that they clearly had very different paths to follow in life, and that she was not suited to follow the path he would have to take to become a Whitman-like or Beat poet. But she recalls that it was a difficult moment for both of them, because, in her words, “the bond between us was profound.”

The early '60's were a hard and lonely time for George. His poetry was developing by leaps and bounds, as he pursued many new avenues of writing. From the Beats he had learned a documentary style, coming from their personal, confessional narratives—but George added something new to it, a concern with the way history affected his own consciousness. These were times fraught with exciting and often-traumatic events, from the Civil Rights marches to the Kennedy assassination to the beginnings of the Vietnam War; and George began experimenting with melding the political events in the outside world with his own personal life and thoughts. In a way, this was revolutionary stuff, but I have no idea how many other writers, if any, even knew he was doing it. He spoke to me about coming under the influence of the young ethno-poet Jerome Rothenberg, and of how for a year or so his own poetry began to reflect Rothenberg's call for “deep image.” But whether he ever met Rothenberg I do not know. What is clear, is that George was rapidly become sick of being an underpaid adjunct professor at NYU. He was tired of living hand-to-mouth, he later wrote, riding hot subways to work every day trying “to push a little Naked Lunch down young Jewish English Major throats clogged” with the likes of Saul Bellow.

He was now doing most of his teaching at Brooklyn College, but they hinted that he would soon be let go unless he entered a Ph.D. program. He could not afford to get one in the U.S., and so he entered an affordable Ph.D. program at the University of Sussex in England, near Brighton, the town that would eventually become his favored spot on earth. It was there his true literary and psychic journey began, but not in classes. He discovered and was overwhelmed by the consciousness-expanding power of LSD. Putting aside his planned doctoral thesis on the Beats, he spent a year doing his own controlled experiments on LSD. In 1965, at the age of 33, he also married a 21-year-old English artist named Pauline, who was still very much under the sway of her traditional British parents. The marriage, needless to say, did not go well; and George recorded that there were also moments when he became physically violent with her, terrifying her.

George and Pauline lived together only a year, in a poor district of London that was filled with immigrants, with her parents apparently hounding him to get a regular job. When they split up, he returned to New York to resume his teaching at NYU and Brooklyn College—but they did not actually divorce until 1971. During the 60's, he seems to have traveled back and forth between the U.S. and England more than once. These were productive years for him as a poet. Between 1965 and 1971, he published nine books of poems! In those days, he identified strongly as a Beat poet—he taught *Howl*, *On the Road*, *The Subterraneans*, and *Naked Lunch*—and would often hang out at Ed Sanders' notorious Peace Eye Bookshop.

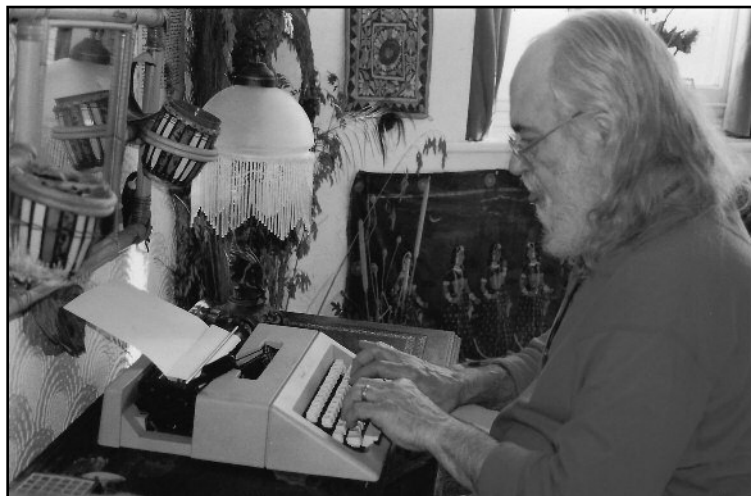
It was actually at the Peace Eye Bookshop in the summer of 1966 that Sanders introduced Dowden to Ginsberg. Allen was already so famous, and publishing his poems in so many small magazines, that Lawrence Ferlinghetti wanted to commission a bibliography of his works. Sanders convinced Ginsberg to let Dowden do the bibliography, thinking that because Dowden was an “academic” he would know what he was doing. In fact, Dowden had never done a bibliography before, and incorrectly began assembling it in alphabetical rather than the proper chronological order—something that was not discovered till it was too late to correct.

But one of the great results of the bibliography project for Dowden was that he and Ginsberg spent ten years corresponding, and Ginsberg sent him boxes of materials, including a copy of almost every work he had ever published. Dowden recalls that a growing friction developed between him and Ferlinghetti as the project progressed, but George and Allen soon became good friends. During the '60's, Allen visited George in both his Brighton and London pads; and in 1973, after George returned from India, Allen invited George to spend a day with him at Barry Miles' house in London, where Allen was staying. That afternoon, when Ginsberg played his harmonium and sang various kinds of songs—blues, Blake chants, and so forth—for George was one of the highlights of George's life. He taped Allen, and would play those tapes for years afterward. George recalled that they all got high smoking the ganja George had brought back from India; then they drove over to Burroughs' pad to share the ganja with the “courtly and appreciative” old junkie. Finally, when they were all completely mellow,

with George still running his tape recorder, their rap session evolved into a hilarious routine of Bill playing the “Master” to Allen's “Apprentice.”

On yet another day, Allen, Peter Orlovsky, and George made a day trip by car to Felpham to visit Blake's house, and according to George they all had a great time together. But despite these occasional good times, these were not happy years for him. He was lonely, troubled, and often angry. He would sometimes spend hours by himself at the movies, “making a little party” with a half pint of whisky. He had a love-hate relationship with his mother—the woman who had abandoned him to an orphanage when he was still a little boy—that a psychoanalyst in New York diagnosed as a classical Oedipal complex, from which George felt himself unable to break free. He felt that that Oedipal complex overshadowed all of his attempted relationships with women; on top of which, he was scared to death of the idea of having children, of having to assume the role of father, which he felt would absolutely end his career as a poet.

George quit psychoanalysis, he told me, when he realized that most of his problems were spiritual, not psychological. It was 1970, and George met his first “guru” in the person of “an enormous New York Jew who ran an Oriental arts business,” name



George Dowden

of Rudi. Rudi told George about the guru Muktananda in India, and suggested that George go to live in Muktananda's ashram in Ganeshpuri (near Bombay) for a year. At just about the same time, the University of Texas offered George \$4,000 for his Ginsberg collection. City Lights was finally about to publish his bibliography of Ginsberg (it would appear the following year, 1971), with Ferlinghetti hurling curses at him for having botched the job (although Ginsberg praised the work and dubbed him “Sir Scholar George”). With the loot from Texas, George left all his troubles in America behind and made his way to Muktananda's ashram.

What happened there, in mid December 1971, transformed Dowden's life forever.

Muktananda was the founder of Siddha yoga. The goal of most yogas is to raise the kundalini, a primal energy that is supposed to be coiled at the base of the spine. But most yogas claim that it takes years of stringent practice to raise the kundalini. Muktananda, by contrast, specialized in *shaktipat*, which was virtually an instantaneous transmission of spiritual energy that could be triggered by just a few words, or even the physical touch of Muktananda upon a disciple. On George's seventh day at the ashram, during a routine meditation presided over by Muktananda, he underwent the most powerful spiritual experience of his life. As he described it years later: “Suddenly, without warning, something grips my whole body in its wings and flies meticulously upward from the base of my spine, an immense atomic-like force straight up the centre of my back into my head! It's stronger than the Acid waves of the first few hours' rush of any LSD I've ever had, and different!”

George stayed on at the ashram nine more months, and he talked with Muktananda about the experience. Muktananda told him that one did not necessarily do anything with a kundalini awakening—it was not as if one suddenly went out to save the world with it. Muktananda said that it was more about being fully oneself and being fully conscious of every moment in one's life. Since he knew George was a poet, Muktananda advised him to continue writing. Before George left the ashram, Muktananda gave him the title of “Kaviraj”: “great poet seer.”

It was not as if the kundalini awakening made George a poet. His many books prove that Dowden was already an accomplished poet before he went to India. But his poetry changed profoundly as a result of what happened at the ashram. George once described his previous poetry as “malefic”—meaning that it stressed the awfulness of life, of politics, and of the universal hurt that is given and received so prolifically on this earth. He actually dedicated one of his early books to “John Fitzgerald Kennedy Lee Harvey Oswald and Jack Ruby who joined, and united us all, in a few moments' consciousness of the one true brotherhood of death in America.” The poetry after his awakening had many new characteristics, including a precision of language it had lacked before and an almost supernatural consciousness of every detail both in his mind and in the world his mind encountered. But above all, his post-awakening poetry was positive—no longer cursing the world and his life, but praising it, celebrating the joy and beauty and wonder of being alive and conscious.

George returned to Brighton, returned to acid for another year of consciousness-altering experiments, and began a daily writing regimen—often in small notebooks he carried about like Kerouac—that continued till the end of his life. A profusion of new books followed. Almost effortlessly, George developed a new form to accommodate his expanded and hyper-attentive consciousness: the “poem-prose poem.” Building on the work of Whitman's natural speech, Williams' variable foot, and Ginsberg's long-breath

line, Dowden came up with a natural flow of paragraphs, each one a kind of “mind-breath” of completed perception; and it was the accumulation of these carefully-crafted building blocks of perception that made the poem. The form had its own problems and limitations—chief among them, the confusion of many people as to whether they were reading prose or poetry. Eventually George dropped the cumbersome designation and just returned to calling his pieces “poems”—to let readers know that this was how they should approach his works.

Miracle followed miracle. Chief after the lifting of his poetry to a cosmic level was the return of his great love Nancy Trifari (now Roncati) to his life. Despite having a conventionally happy marriage to a lawyer in a New Jersey suburb, with three children she loved very much, Nancy still had an empty space in her life, which had a lot to do with the love George Dowden had inspired in her, and the particular beauty he had seen in her, and written of, which no one else had ever uncovered. Over the years she had sought to discover whether George had succeeded in his career as poet. In 1981, in a library reference book, she was gratified to learn that he had published fourteen books. She wondered if the poem he’d written for her 22nd birthday was in one of those books, and later that year she summoned the courage to write to City Lights to ask if they could help her locate the poem George had written so many years before.

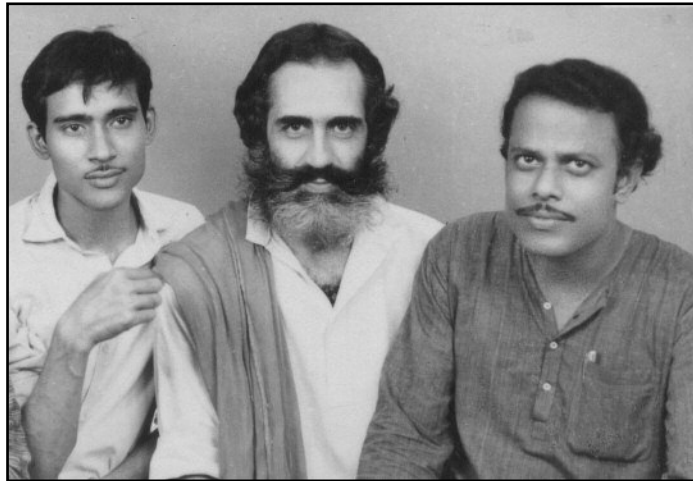
City Lights co-owner Nancy Peters could not locate the poem, but she did something even better; she forwarded Nancy Roncati’s letter to Dowden in England. Nancy’s letter could not have come at a better time for George. Unable to afford living in England any longer, he was about to return to live at his elderly mother’s house in a suburb of Philadelphia—a move that would prove so disastrous it would almost drive him completely mad (and which he would write of in one of his most powerful poems, “Time of the Crucible”). He was saved from ending his life in an institution by a psychiatrist’s timely prescription of Mellaril, but also, surely, by the fact that Nancy re-entered his life with a deep, healing love and concern for his well-being.

George and Nancy corresponded for 15 months, taking their love to levels of mind and spirit it had never reached before. On September 22, 1982, on the grass in front of Lyndhurst Castle in Tarrytown, New York, George declared her his “spiritual bride.” Forty-five years old and still married and in the midst of raising a family, Nancy was in no position to become his actual bride. George would soon return to England, to live again in Brighton; but before he did, they contrived to have a sexual interlude, to include their bodies in this new union, by his joining her in her camper near New York City. George, who had spent his life searching for unconditional love, had finally found it, and he was projected into an ecstasy he had never imagined possible. The following year, Nancy helped him purchase a 5-floor walk-up condominium overlooking the sea on Brighton’s most famous street, Marine Parade, which he proudly called “the Cave,” though it was wonderfully sunny and bright; and George now had both a wife and a permanent home. Though much of their relationship for the next 31 years, until he died in 2014, would be by telephone or letter, Nancy inspired book after book of poems, as well as a novel about their relationship, *Songbirds Nestle in Her Hair*—to the point where I once wrote that Dowden was “unquestionably the most important love poet of our era.” She also unleashed a torrent of creativity in both poetry and prose, resulting in another dozen books—among them both a wild autobiographical novel, *The Moving I*, reminiscent of Celine, and several of his greatest books of poetry, including *The Deepening*, *Being Somewhere Saying Something*, and *The Eternities of Shiva*.

George spent decades roaming the waterfront of Brighton, often in orange Hindu *lungi* (man’s skirt) and a red Kaviraj T-shirt specially made for him by the wife he called “Annie,” with his long natural grey beard and Shiva pendants, and notebook and pen in hand—and was called everything from “Father Christmas” to “Galileo” and “Karl Marx” by the locals. The theme of “his consciousness meeting the consciousness of the world” became central to all his writings. A couple of times a year “Annie” would leave her family obligations and come across the water to spend a week or two with him. In 1995, at last free of her American marriage, Nancy and George took formal marriage vows, though the nature of their marriage, more in spirit than in flesh, did not change.

Life for George was far from paradisaical, however. From the time he first reunited with Nancy at age 50, he was plagued with health problems that grew steadily worse until he died. He had cut down his drinking to a few lagers a week, but he was a lifelong smoker, and eventually suffered from COPD. He had arthritis so severe that he needed strong pain pills just to get around and do his daily work. He had never been careful about his eating, either, and ended up with arteries so badly clogged that in 1997 he was forced to have quadruple bypass surgery. The artery disease led to the amputation

of his left leg in 2009. He also, eventually, developed prostate cancer, Parkinson’s Disease, and, in the last 2 or 3 years of his life, Lewy Body Dementia, which affected both his thought processes and his personality—to a point where Nancy sometimes had trouble recognizing him. Though I visited him twice, in 2003 and 2010, in his last years he asked me not to come to see him, because he did not want me to witness what his life had descended to, being cared for round the clock by attendants who had to help him in and out of bed and to take care of his most basic needs. Yet he continued to write till the very end, working on a poem called “Ward Log,” which he had begun at the Newhaven Rehabilitation Centre shortly after the amputation of his leg. It was going to be his great cosmic epic of human life and death—but he never lived to finish it.



George Dowden with Indian hungryalist movement authors Tridib Mitra (left) and Subimal Basak (right)

In those last years, George developed a very small circle of younger writers and poets who recognized his greatness and tried to help his work get known—chief among them myself, a Missouri poet named Dan Crocker, and the British writer Dave Cunliffe. But by and large Dowden turned his back on the idea of mainstream recognition. It frustrated those of us who cared about him, because we knew that in all the ways that really matter, he really was a great poet. A great poet has a unique voice—you read a few lines of him/her, and you recognize that poet at once. Think of John Keats or Dylan Thomas—could their lines come from anyone else? There is no question George developed such a poetic voice. He also developed what every great poet must have—a unique vision of the world. In George’s case, it was the viewpoint of the “comic yogi.” Unable to follow the strict discipline of traditional yoga, George continued on with his cigarettes, his lagers, and his appreciation for young women’s round bottoms, but he did so in a way that his own weaknesses simply made his consciousness grow larger and more compassionate toward the rest of the world. Finally, George had that gift that only the greatest poets possess: which is to make the reader live in their world, follow them in their every footstep, and feel each of their words and thoughts is the reader’s very own.

In the last years of his life, George worked sporadically on a primer that he felt would help guide young poets. It was never published, but the advice it gives is priceless. Though clearly many would disagree with him—such as the Language Poets and Deconstructionists, both of whom George loathed—George declared that there can be no great modern poetry that is not in the “threefold Whitman Tradition.” To begin with, he said, that tradition dictates that modern poetry must be in free verse and must be personal. But in George’s view, Whitman also laid down a third law for modern poets that can be ignored only at the peril of trivializing even the finest writing. Like *Song of Myself*, modern poetry must also manifest “down-to-earth vision or mysticism,” a cosmic view of everyday reality—what has sometimes been imprecisely called “cosmic consciousness.”

What George referred to, he made clear, was a way of speaking so directly to the heart of humanity that not just college professors but even ordinary workingmen are struck by the truth of the great poet’s words, which resonate like a bell in the very core of their being. Dante had this “down-to-earth vision,” Dowden said, and so did William Blake. So did Henry Miller. So did Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg.

And so did the poet Kaviraj George Dowden.

Gerald Nicosia is an author, poet, journalist, interviewer, and literary critic. He wrote what many consider to be the finest biography of Jack Kerouac, *Memory Babe*. He is Jan Kerouac’s literary executor and has edited *Jan Kerouac: A Life in Memory*.

HAMILL (continued from page 3)

“That’s not my father,
and that’s not my dog,” I cried
angry little three-year-old terrified
of the dark and the switch
their farm an alien land,
“and you can’t keep me here.”
and I tried to run away.

The poet’s voice of the terrified three-year-old sinks in.

Charles Potts is an American poet. He founded *Litmus* literary magazine and the *Litmus* publishing company, which published his friend Charles Bukowski’s book “Poems written before jumping out of an 8 story window.” He lives in Walla Walla.

THE COMPLETE POETRY OF AIMÉ CÉSAIRE

Allan Graubard

Consider Aimé Césaire: a black man born in 1913 in a small town in Martinique, then a French colony, whose parents provided well enough for him and his four siblings but in the shadow of rural poverty; a brilliant young student who finally escaped his island home for Paris and the *École normale supérieure*, where he obtained an advanced studies diploma, his thesis on writers of the Harlem Renaissance; a young poet who would quickly evolve to a poet of the first order, and who found his voice, not in exile, but by returning to Martinique, this island which he detested and loved then, and which his extraordinary *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* reveals in all its poverty, cultural myopia, racial oppression, and lush conflictive beauty; a co-founder of *négritude* and anti-colonialist who found in surrealism a ready staging ground, which he used poignantly and powerfully; an animator in the maturation of black consciousness in the Caribbean, Africa, and South America; a statesman (elected and re-elected mayor of Fort de France for fifty plus years with a seat in the French National Assembly); an axial presence in the transition from French Caribbean colonial possessions to departments in France and the broader struggle for independent statehood in French Africa as elsewhere.

Consider Aimé Césaire: co-founder of *négritude*'s initial magazine, *Étudiant Noire*¹, during his student days in Paris (1935) and the surrealist *Tropiques*² (1941-1945), after his return to Martinique as a teacher during the Vichy fascist period; author of eight collections of poems, four plays, and decisive critical works, including his 1945 *Poetry and Knowledge* and his 1955 *Discourse on Colonialism* – the latter apparently quite important for scholars and activists involved in black liberation struggles, from Civil Rights and Black Power to antiwar movements.

Consider Aimé Césaire in his totality, as a man, poet, playwright, critic, teacher, politician, citizen, husband, and father (ever so briefly touched on here) – and then turn to this new volume of his complete poetry, finally translated into English, understanding that at last we have his works as he originally wrote them and as they appear in the French edition of his poems published in 1994. As the translators, A. James Arnold and Clayton Eshleman, rightly note in their commentary, this original collection reveals the poet in his true scope and depth, without the various edits and alterations he made when a member of the French Communist Party (1945–1956).

It is thus the man entire who speaks to us now through his poetry, and the poetry that speaks of this man, and all he writes about the world he lived in.

The Poetry

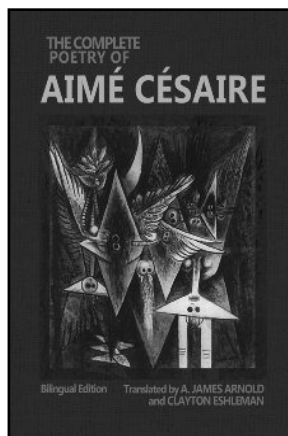
Notebook of Return to the Native Land

In August 1939, an avant-garde literary magazine in Paris, *Volontés*, publishes a long poem in prose and verse by a Martiniquan student recently in Paris. Aimé Césaire has just returned to his native island.³

The poem is panoramic and riveting, as much an expression of disgust at what Césaire finds upon his return to Martinique as an embrace of its complexity. This island colony formed by slavery and its repercussions over three centuries cannot continue as it has. Its people must awaken to their history, which roots in Africa, and the racist policies of assimilation by a White French authority that has compromised their identity, as much psychologically as socially. The authentic emancipation of Martiniquan blacks is the only resource that will ensure the reclamation of their unique yet common humanity.

How can it happen? Political and economic rebellion is one route but certainly incomplete, and its rhetoric abstract and depersonalizing. Before this rhetoric is the concrete human reality that Césaire faces and that his poetry grapples with first hand. As with Whitman, it is this interchange that fuses in the poem, transforming it and the poet at white heat.

He begins the poem, with its 109 stanzas, at ground zero with an infectious refrain,



The Complete Poetry of Aimé Césaire

Translated by A. James Arnold and Clayton Eshleman
Bilingual Edition
962 pp.
Wesleyan University Press, 2017



Aimé Césaire

“At the end of the small hours,” noting with the single line of stanza 4 the pressured compass he endures: “the dreadful inanity of our *raison d’être*.” Thereafter, the arc of the poem pulses with descriptions of what and whom he encounters, including himself, as in stanza 49: “I refuse to pass off my puffiness for authentic glory. /And I laugh at my former puerile fantasies” — referring in part to a glorified Africa.

In stanza 52, however, he defines his rebellious freedom as poet divorced from known references: “I am of no nationality recognized by the chancelleries.” While several lines further on he draws in raw, real terms an unforgettable portrait of an encounter on a streetcar; the near counterpoint infusing the poem with as much scope, and as true to life, as Césaire is capable of: “one evening on the streetcar facing me, a nigger. /A nigger big as a pogo trying to make himself small on the streetcar bench.” Then the focus shifts, magnifying its significance: “He was COMICAL AND UGLY,/COMICAL AND UGLY, for sure/I displayed a big complicitous smile.../My cowardice rediscovered!...MY heroism, what a farce!”

Césaire, though, is no fool and however much he takes his people, his town, his culture and history to task, his inspirations – from the Harlem Renaissance, jazz, Pan-Africanism, French symbolists and surrealists, etc. – enable his exaltation of a nobility to come rooted in rhythm, the implicit lyrical rhythm of the poem and the visceral rhythm of dance and ritual, as he notes in stanza 67: “but who yield, seized, to the essence of things/ignorant of surfaces but captivated by the motion of all things/indifferent to conquering, but playing the game of the world/truly the eldest sons of the world!”

Twenty stanzas on, Césaire begins a chant balanced on the bitter, cutting blade of slavery. But through it there quickly emerges an admission of compassion and festivity that, for this reader, holds the character of the poet and the resonance of the poem in its grasp: “I accept...I accept...totally, without reservation.../, my race that no ablution of hyssop mixed with lilies could purify.” And the last stanza invites us to dance with an accent that we can easily recognize, simply because it returns through the generations, then as now: “rally to my side my dances/my bad nigger dances...”

From this poem written on the bloody cusp of World War II by a black man returned to his native Martinique, a poet and leader of consequence appears, soon to step onto an international stage.

*

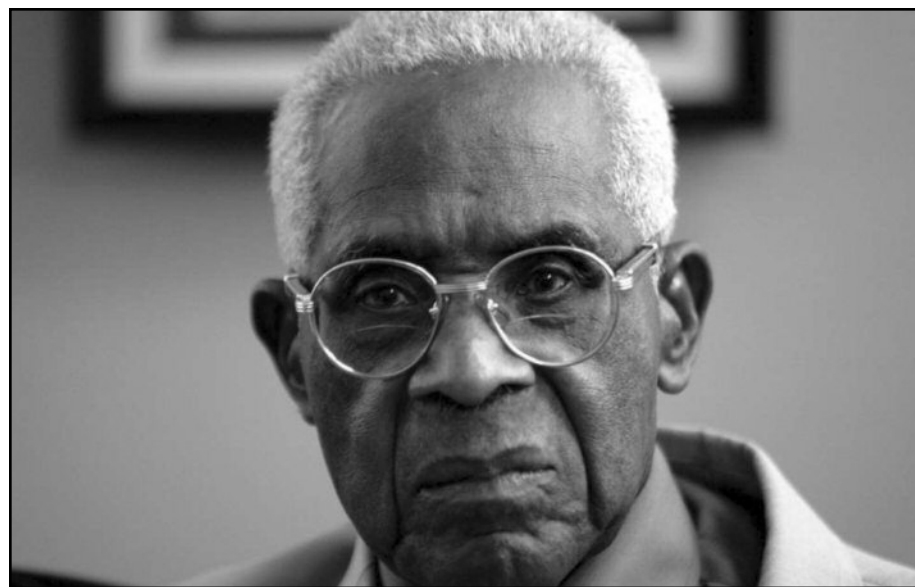
In 1941, Andre Breton is a newly arrived exile in Martinique from France. One afternoon, while searching for a ribbon for his daughter at a Fort de France variety store, he notices a small magazine on the counter: *Tropiques*. Curious, he purchases a copy. As he reads his astonishment grows. On this small colonial island cast off by the war is a vivacious expression precise to surrealism. He soon meets the editors. For Breton as for Aimé Césaire, the meeting will invigorate a rapport that survives their differences. *Tropiques* quickly identifies as surrealist, with Breton’s collaboration. Breton’s essay on Césaire, *A Great Black Poet*, which discusses their meeting and its broader significance, after several pages turns to *The Notebook*.... For Breton, this “irreplaceable document” is “nothing less than the greatest lyrical monument of our time.”⁴

Miraculous Weapons and Solar Throat Slashed

In these two books of poems, published in 1946 and 1948, Césaire’s enrichment of contemporary surrealism unfolds. The former is published in 1946; a majority of its 26 poems first appearing in *Tropiques* and other poems in allied surrealist magazines. The latter book is published in 1948 with 72 poems.⁵ As recognition for the brilliance and verve of his work expands, his public life evolves. In 1945, he runs for the mayoralty of Fort de France on the Communist Party ticket and wins, though not yet a party member. He joins the party several months later.⁶

Between the two books similar means and motivations prevail if reaching full maturation in the latter book. While rooted to the here and now, Césaire exalts the rebellious freedom he has gained as poet with social consequence. An incantatory, prophetic persona feeds the epiphanic charge of his metaphors. Sexual and erotic energies embrace the tropical landscape and its heated cycles as they reveal to Césaire the woman he loves and, by extension, Martinican women. The African serpent, vegetation and other gods of Egypt and the Near East, magic, Voodoo, and Zoroastrianism uproot Christian icons and beliefs. The heavy historical wounds of slavery burn under an anti-colonialist insurrectional horizon. Literature will either follow suite or lose its historical valor.

The *Miraculous Weapons* sets the stage in its first poem, “Gunnery Warning,” where Césaire stoically waits “at the edge of the world” for a spiritual and politic rebirth in “the brushfire of brotherhood.” In “The Thoroughbreds,” which follows, Césaire seeks the emergence of “men” free of historical calamity, and finds in himself, a vision of man and Earth: “at the backs of his eyes the earth awaited/ the stars.” In “Have No Mercy for Me,” while facing a swamp, he sees it anew as “a viper born from the blond force of/resplendence”; whose poisonous bite is an antidote to a greater poison: racism. “Serpent Sun,” the fourth poem in the book, erupts from its first line: “serpent sun eye bewitching my eye/and the sea verminous with islands crackling in the fingers of flamethrower/roses and my intact thunderstruck body.”



Aimé Césaire

The poems, however short or long, imbued with dense lyrical deliria, populate a realm quite clearly our own yet brimming with visionary excess. Here is “the wind that is no more now than a pole for gathering the fruits of all/the seasons of the sky” (“Poem for the Dawn”); here Césaire notes: “as for me I have nothing to fear/I am before Adam...” (“Visitation”); here is “your flour-covered body where mahogany oil pumps the precious/gears of your/tidal eyes/with your crocus sex” (“Bateke”); here “male flowers will sleep in coves of mirrors/and even the armor of trilobites/will sink in the half-light of forever” (“Perdition”).

The poem from which the title of the book is taken continues the assault with: “The great machete blow of red pleasure full in the face” and its provocative rejoinder: “there was blood and that tree called flamboyant and which never deserves its name more than on the eve of cyclones and of sacked cities...”

Titles to preceding poems follow apace with their own spice: “The Irredeemable,” “Night Tom-Tom,” “Water Woman,” “Automatic Crystal Set,” which lets us know that “the rain has eaten the sun with chopsticks.” And what of the poem “Conquest of Dawn” where: “We die our deaths in forests of giant eucalyptus coddling the wreckage of/preposterous steamers/in the country where grow/unbreathable drosera”

Throughout is Césaire, suddenly freed from the lethargic poor enmity of living in



Aimé Césaire with Suzanne Césaire

Martinique as a second-class citizen with a language that he transmutes in a cyclically mythic dance that returns him to an interpreted Africa yet to realize independence in real time, and his native hope for a post-colonial island.

“The Dogs Were Silent,” a long dramatic poem in the form of an oratorio, concludes the book. Written in high convulsive style, it tells of a rebel who provokes his people to revolt but who is killed. According to the translators, the work associates the main character, “the Rebel,” with Osiris whom Set murders, and whose body cut into multiple pieces Isis magically revives as Spring revives the wintry land.

Solar Throat Slashed capitalizes on what its predecessor has gained with purpose and velocity, giving new life to surrealism and French letters. For readers interested in the wider scope of Césaire’s activities, it is also published just before his “Discourse on Colonialism” appears in first draft in a French magazine.⁷

The collection opens with the poem “Magic” as the first line sings: “with a thin slice of sky on a hunk of earth/you beasts hissing into the face of this dead woman.” An ever restless, ironic conclusion restates his freedom as poet with the “five-branched chancelloress stars” whose “...drops of fallen milk/reinstate a black god ill born of his thunder.”

One after the other, the poems transform the history of the black experience in the repressive context of European colonialism and slavery, and as they do so a shared expression of cross-racial commonalities emerges. Leading the way is a heightened sense of immanence born from Césaire’s vision of political and mythic revolt, his wit, this infectious tropical Caribbean island, his embrace of love as elective affinity, and more.

The third poem in the collection, “Lynch I”, with its matter-of-fact yet startling title, begins with questions as if the poet were caught by the terrifying subject and terrified victim: “Why does spring grab me by the throat? what does it want of me...I jeer at you spring for flaunting your blind eye and your bad breath. Your debauchery your corrupt kisses...” Who or what is Lynch — a person, plant, place or thing, the poet’s friend, enemy or lover? As he enumerates the multiple beings that the term possesses, it engorges the entirety of the present in which he lives. Lynch and lynching’s are everywhere and nowhere; in the mud of a bayou at dusk, on “a black handkerchief atop a pirate ship mast,” as ghost, woman, friend or victim whose “beautiful squirted eye” and “huge mouth” are “mute unless a jerking there spills the delirium of mucus...” Its companion poem, “Lynch II,” placed later in the collection, focuses on the effect of the act with a tearing, tender lament: “eye without shores without memory...”/“with in his nostrils unhoped for flowers/with on his back the youthful flight of the curlew birds of phosphorescence...”

In “Mississippi,” with its racially torqued, terrorist history, Césaire ends the poem defiantly: “Too bad for you men who do not see that you cannot stop me from building/to his fill/egg-headed islands of flagrant sky/under the calm ferocity of the immense geranium of our sun”

A new mythology has begun to form under Césaire’s prescient eyes. After the slaughter and destruction of WWII, the veritable absence of myth – of any myth worth our allegiance — has become a leading conduit for surrealist response. “The Sun’s Knife Stab in the Back of Surprised Cities” thus depicts a composite creature with biblical reference: “And I saw a first animal/it had a crocodile body equine feet a dog’s head but when I looked more/closely in place of buboes were scars left at different times by storms on a/body long subjected to obscure ordeals...”

Inspired by complexities, parallelisms, and inherent song, Césaire’s lyrical gifts flower in “Son of Thunder”; a poem whose subject may refer to his wife, Suzanne, beautifully merged with their island. It is a poem of eight lines that I have never tired

of reading. “And without her deigning to seduce the jailers,” it begins, “/at her bosom a bouquet of hummingbirds has exfoliated/at her ears buds of atolls have sprouted...”

This expansiveness finds ever-greater reason in an admission “From Millibars of the Storm.” Rising from the barometric pressures exerted by the storms of time and disasters, the poem exists “to liberate the space where bristles the heart of things and the advent of man”

Jockeying back and forth between his foci, weaving them into rare poetic combustions, vegetal entities infuse Césaire’s “Chevelure” with the smell and girth of their interplay: “all the juices rising in the lust of the earth/all the poisons that nocturnal alembics/distill in the involucre of the/malvacae/all the saponarias’ thunder/are like discordant words written by the flaming of the pyres over the/sublime oriflammes of your revolt”

As with its predecessor, *Miraculous Weapons*, the titles of the poems have their own appeal, as they mark out their human and mythic geography: “Transmutation,” “Apotheosis,” “Ex-Voto for a Shipwreck,” “All the Way from Akkad from Elam from Sumer,” “Noon Knives,” “At the Locks of the Void,” “Ode to Guinea,” or “Antipodal Dwelling” – in which poetry is likened to a: “Crucible in which is born the world hair humus of the first earth...”

Césaire concludes the book by clarifying the ethical force of the poetic as he knows and lives it with his family, friends, and colleagues in “The Light’s Judgment”: “Over the arc of a circle/in the public movement of shorelines/the flame/is solitary and splendid in its/upright judgment”.



First Congress of Writers and Black Artists in 1956. Aimé Césaire, Alioune Diop, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Richard Wright and Frantz Fanon were there alongside Jean-Paul Sartre, Claude Lévi-Strauss, René Depestre, Édouard Glissant and James Baldwin.

Later Works

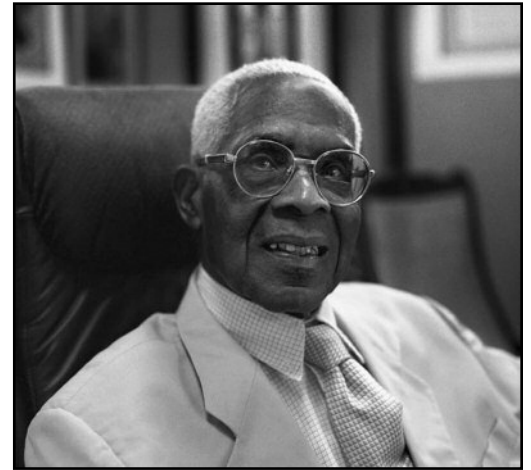
It will be four years before Césaire publishes another book of poems with four additional books to follow. Each is a compelling testament that readers can encounter as they will.

Lost Body publishes in 1950 with 10 poems and 32 engravings contributed by Picasso in an expensive edition for wealthy collectors.⁸ It advances a vision of négritude “from the depths of the timeless sky,” as Césaire opening couplet tells. However, what “body” from the title is “lost” other than the body of language Césaire seeks to revalorize and the language of a body that speaks in gestures exclusive to his space, both intensive (linguistic and physical) and extensive (international). “Lost Body,” the fifth poem in the collection, tells us where the body, or parts of it, can be found: Krakatoa, monsoon, cloaca, Zambezi, and the “dark forgiving earth,” from which he, Césaire, “will command the islands to exist.”

Ten years later *Ferrements* publishes, with 49 poems; the same year, 1960, when 13 French colonies gain independence. As the translators note, it is this book that “establishes Césaire as the poet of decolonization.” The title, which refers to the iron shackles that slaves wore, belongs to the slave trader’s vocabulary; an overlay with twisted roots that infect Césaire’s present still. Coincident with this book is a subtle change to methodology. He forefronts the charged political context rather than the metaphorical richness and lyricism that has distinguished his work thus far.

Its first poem, “Ferraments,” sets the scene on a slave boat under full sail, which nauseates Césaire. Later poems deal with more intimate, and past and current events, collectively experienced. These include: “Hail to Guinea,” on the birth of the new nation; “The Time of Freedom,” responding to the brutal repression of a Leftist Ivorian political movement, published eight days after this event⁹; “Memorial for Luis Delgres” – the last

defender of black freedom in Guadeloupe, killed by Napoleonic forces during the capture of Fort Matouba, May 26, 1802, who reintroduce slavery that Delgres sought to abolish; and “On the State of the Union,” which speaks of the cruel lynching of 14-year old Emmitt Till in Mississippi in 1955. The last image of the final poem in the book offers a ray of hope but only by confronting what has and does occur, this: “outrageous horizon of course/a child will half open the door...”



Aimé Césaire

i, lamninaría publishes in 1982, an homage to his friend Wilfrado Lam who dies that year, and as a means to collect his poems over the last two decades. Casting back over the struggles he has engaged, the writing done and progress achieved, a moderate, even elegiac tone permeates. Circulating through different poems as an ironic half-shading is the despair and anger he feels, the reified culture and depressed economy he must contend with, and the inbred memory of slavery, both desultory and enraging. Not one to linger, he memorializes Leon Damas, fellow co-creator of négritude, and his friend Franz Fanon, whose philosophy and writings, also critically evolved from it. As Césaire notes in the first line of the first poem in the collection: “I inhabit a sacred wound.”

Noiria and *Like a Misunderstanding of Salvation* follow, the last publishing in 1994, both of which contain brilliant, moving poems. His public life continues, though, as mayor, which he finally ends at age 88 in 2001. Four years on the city makes him its first honorary mayor then he causes a minor scandal when refusing to meet with French president, Sarkozy, as protest over a new law recognizing the positive aspects of colonialism. On April 17, 2008, Aimé Césaire dies at age 94. On the steps of the Pantheon in Paris a plaque is set that celebrates him.

The Complete Poetry of Aimé Césaire is a fundamental work for readers of twentieth century poetry, and those especially interested in the relationships that define a poet’s response to his fraught and bloody time. Aimé Césaire passion for fully realized selfhood and the reformation of black identity in the lush, raw, engaging poetry that we know him for is testament enough to ensure his significance in the 21st century.

What in Césaire time is different from ours? And what can we learn from this poet who, in defying colonialism, helped to transform that inheritance, *his* inheritance, into a ground from which independent choice and states arose; a chameleon ground, no doubt, but one at least where we can see each other as we see ourselves, and who or what we might become?

Notes

- ¹ *Etudiant Noir* is co-founded by Césaire, Leopold Sedar Senghor from Senegal and Leon Damas from French Guiana. It explores the experience of French speaking black students and peoples under colonialism.
- ² *Tropiques* is co-founded by Aimé Césaire, his wife Suzanne, and René Menil. Repressed by the authorities in 1943, it publishes clandestinely until 1945.
- ³ In 1941 it is published in Havana, in Spanish, with a forward by Benjamin Peret and drawings by Wilfrado Lam; just returned to his native Cuba. It is re-published thereafter in numerous editions and languages.
- ⁴ The essay first publishes in *Hemispheres* (Yvon Goll, ed., New York, Fall/Winter 1943-1944); then as the preface to the first French-English publication of the poem (Yvon Goll & Lionel Abel, trans., Brentano’s 1947).
- ⁵ The publication of the complete book here, as originally titled, restores Césaire cuts and edits, which he made to frame the book as more responsive to political struggles and communist perspectives. In 1961, although having broken with the party five years prior, the re-publication of the book with the title *Cadastre* sustains this redaction; with 27 poems cut entirely and large and small edits to 23 other poems.
- ⁶ Césaire resigns from the French CP in 1956 in solidarity with Pan-African perspectives and as criticism of its reactionary literary principles.
- ⁷ The essay is published as “Impossible Contact” in *Chemins du monde*. During this period, as the translators note, “the political climate was tense and repression in colonies severe,” including Madagascar and the Setif massacre in Algeria.
- ⁸ In 1986 an English trade version of the book, translated by Clayton Eshelmen and Annette Smith, is published (New York: George Brazillier, Inc.).
- ⁹ In 1954, the poem appears twice in Russian translation; in a Moscow literary magazine *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, and in a book of ethnography on the people of Africa *Narodni Afriki*.

Allan Graubard is a poet, playwright and critic. A recent play, *Woman Bomb/Sade*, was produced in New York in 2008.

A RIVER CAPTURED

Rose Morrison

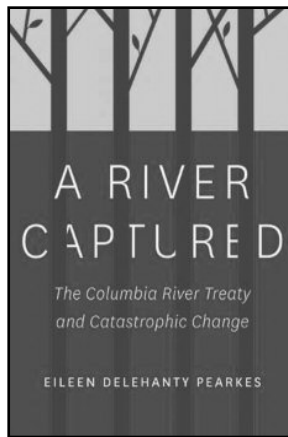
Eileen Delehanty Pearkes' *A River Captured: The Columbia River Treaty and Catastrophic Change* is the most important non-fiction book to come my way in some time. In this timely work Pearkes tells not only the history of the Canada – United States of America Columbia River Treaty (CRT), but also its important, attendant stories and consequences that need to be heeded.

A River Captured could have been rendered as a straightforward treatise on the CRT and earlier agreements affecting the longest river in the Pacific Northwest; happily, that is not the way this author writes. Pearkes' work 'explores landscape and the human imagination with a focus on the history of the upper Columbia River and its tributaries.' Her writing includes books such as *The Geography of Memory*, essays and poetry. She writes from Nelson, British Columbia and is also a public speaker.

Rising in southeastern British Columbia, The Columbia River flows northwest along the Rocky Mountain Trench, rounding Big Bend at the northern tip of the Selkirk Mountains before heading south through Revelstoke and Castlegar and on to the U.S.A. It continues south through Washington State, then marks the boundary between Washington and Oregon as it runs west past Portland to Astoria and the Pacific Ocean. Its huge basin takes in significant regions of B.C. and five U.S. states.

The aims of the bi-national 1964 Columbia River Treaty are water management of the Upper Columbia River Basin and power generation, with benefits going to both countries. Within the agreement, Canada constructed three river dams in British Columbia, Duncan, Mica, and Keenleyside; and the United States built Libby Dam in Montana. (Washington State's Grand Coulee Dam, built in the 1940s stores water, generates power and provides irrigation water from the Columbia River system to the arid Columbia Plateau. This dam, Pearkes notes, was the first major catastrophe facing returning Kokanee, Coho and Chinook salmon as they tried to reach spawning grounds in the Columbia's far reaches). The CRT dams tolled the knell for those ancient salmon runs and impoverished the river, flooding reservoir sites and drowning their former riparian and dryland natural abundance and biodiversity.

Extensive research has gone into *A River Captured*. In telling her tale, Pearkes refers to CRT documents, water licence hearings, newspaper articles, and old maps showing farmland, First Nations traditional lands, roads and settlements that now lie beneath reservoir waters. She visits places on the Columbia in Canada and the United States, talking with people as she goes. A farmer whose parents' best Arrow Lakes land was expropriated still farms at the edges of the reservoir, and is always mindful of her father's despair and powerlessness when their farm was flooded. Several others tell of unfair treatment and disruption of livelihoods when land was taken; the author's chats with local people are engaging and informative. She overnights on a Sinixt reserve in Washington state; there is no longer a Sinixt presence in B.C. since most of their territory around Arrow Lakes is now submerged. Back in B.C. she travels by boat with a friend to the rocky outcrops above that waterline; he can still find long-forgotten First Nations' artifacts there. It is a long journey to the Mica dam, but Pearkes takes her family camping at Kinbasket Lake, the dam's reservoir. She remarks that the reservoirs of the big CRT dams have not fulfilled the promise of becoming popular recreation sites. They are remote, sometimes bare; and sudden changes in water levels can be dangerous.



A River Captured: The Columbia River Treaty and Catastrophic Change
Eileen Delehanty Pearkes
Rocky Mountain Books, 2016



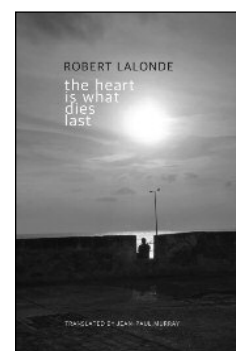
Eileen Delehanty Pearkes

A River Captured is a story of political arrogance and narrow-minded decision-making, disrupted lives and devastated nature; and the officious dismissal of knowledgeable, engaged people who advised caution or protested against the Columbia River Treaty. But not all is doom and gloom; the book's last section focuses on recent mitigation: reservoir bank revegetation is proving successful, more birds are returning to some sites, biodiversity is increasing and some salmonid restocking projects are working.

Back in the 1960s W.A.C. Bennett, then premier of British Columbia, had two huge projects on the go: commoditization of the Upper Columbia River, then, with the help of cash paid by the U.S.A. for CRT downstream water control and power generation on the Columbia, completion of a dam and power-generating station on B.C.'s Peace River. The dam that bears his name sits at the head of Williston Lake on the north-eastern B.C. stretch of the Peace.

2018 will be an interesting year. The U.S.A. is conducting a review of the Columbia River Treaty in preparation for 2024 when it can be renegotiated. Re-establishment of the salmon runs is on the American want list; so is a reduced payment to Canada for downstream benefits. There is another river water management project for British Columbians to watch this year; the B.C. government is going ahead with the paused Site C Dam on the Peace River, claiming that too much money has already been spent on the project to cancel it. **Apparently that government does not know that an environmental good such as a river cannot be given a higher value by turning it into an economic asset; a river has no price.** Is it possible that politicians and governments on both sides of the border can learn from past mistakes, and make future far-reaching decisions with humility? Pearkes' *A River Captured: The Columbia River Treaty and Catastrophic Change* is published by Rocky Mountain Books. This is a good time to read it.

Rose Morrison is a longtime contributor to PRRB. Her last review was on *Victory Gardens for Bees*.



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REMEMBERING PETER TROWER

Jim Christy

In November my old and close friend, Peter Trower, died at Lion's Gate Hospital in North Vancouver. The obituaries were generous but concentrated on his biography to the exclusion of his remarkable poetry. Given the life that Trower led this might at first seem understandable. If they'd only have gotten it right.

The figure that emerges from the eulogies is a misrepresentation of the man, a reification, some curmudgeonly but lovable uncle who'd get involved in episodes you'd chuckle over years later, shaking your head and saying "Old uncle Pete, he was sure some character!"

To hear some people talk now, those who barely knew him or knew him not at all, you'd think he was a Rabelaisian roisterer swaggering into the pub with a backwoods Daisy Mae on each arm; the bull of the woods standing a round for the house and taking on all comers, the life of the party, any party. The poetry must evidently have come to him unbidden, slipped by fairies under his pillow in haywire camps and skidroad hotel rooms.

In reality, Pete was quiet, and awkward in company. He waited until people approached him before saying a thing. He worked and reworked his verse. Before he was sent to Lion's Gate Hospital Pete was in a care home suffering from Alzheimer's. For a few years poet Jamie Reid, until his own death, was a faithful visitor.

Pete had, according to hospital nurses, but two visitors at Lion's Gate. I'm fortunate to have arrived back in British Columbia in time to see him two days before he passed away. Pete then reminded me by turns of an old baby with his unwrinkled skin, his round, bald head turned gaunt, and of an ancient Buddha, the thin Indian one who had been slipped a handful of anti-depressants. I don't know if he recognized me or not. When I told Pete I was back in Gibsons, he said, "I'm in Gibsons."

Fortunately he had the companionship of a poet from England named Stuart Newton. Stuart probably saw Peter every day toward the end. By coincidence I had just two months earlier met Stuart for the first time on a bus in the Yukon. We started talking across the aisle. Also, on that trip was another friend from the Sunshine Coast, Brad Benson. Stuart was pleased to be seeing sites prominent in the works of his all-time favourite poet, Robert Service.

Later Stuart said to us, "My second favourite poet – Well, you've probably never heard of him – is named Peter Trower."

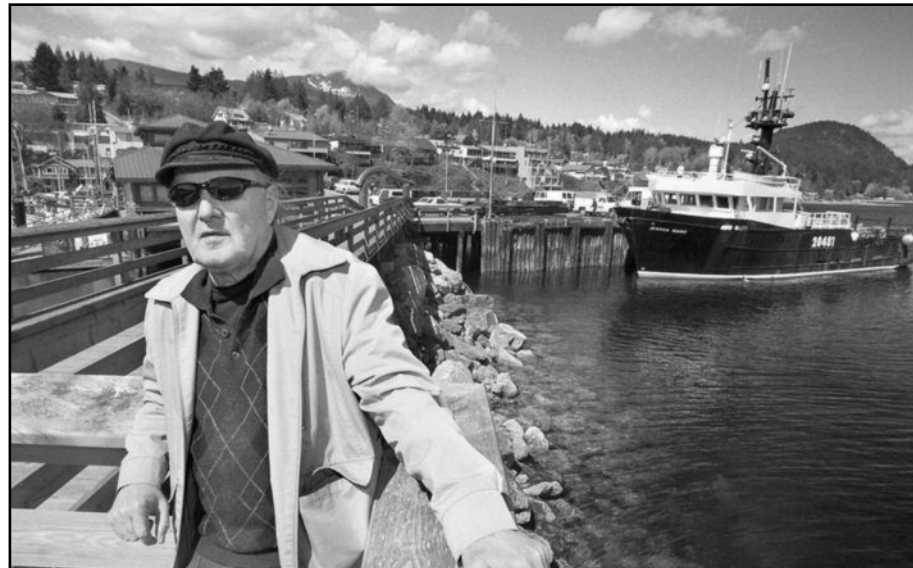
Brad and I allowed as how we had indeed heard of the fellow and in fact were old friends of the great man. Pete and I first met in 1992. I was new to the Sunshine Coast but aware of him by reputation. We immediately recognized each other as kindred spirits after literally recognizing each other with no need for an introduction. The meeting occurred in the most unlikely of places, outside Goody's Candy Shoppe at the Sunnycrest Mall. "Are you...?" "Yes, and you must be..."

With Pete at the time was Paul Murphy, an NDP advance man and sometime actor. We all became tight friends. Pete telephoned me five times a week for years. Every morning I'd hear that mumbly – growly voice, "Hey, Jimmy, listen..."

The other two days, he would be visiting his lady friend, Yvonne Klan, in North Vancouver, and that would have meant a toll call. Pete was, as everyone who knew him understood, a bit of a tightwad. He was also very conservative. I had an old Pontiac Acadian that I'd decorated with travel mementos and which became quite an attraction. Crowds would gather around it but the 'Traveling Light' car embarrassed my friend.

One evening I showed up at Pete's apartment where he was downing a few with writer John Moore but the booze was running out. Though past tipsy, Pete insisted that he required twelve more Extra Old Stock. John and I wedged him in the Traveling Light car, and I drove us to the liquor store and back. The next day Pete had no memory of the jaunt and was horrified when informed that he'd actually ridden in the thing and had no doubt been seen.

On another occasion his conservatism and thriftiness met head to head but he, after a struggle, reached a compromise. We had run into each other on the ferry from Langdale to Horseshoe Bay. Pete was headed for Yvonne's place. He asked for a ride assuming I had my day to day car. When I told him I was taking my 'funny' car to a



Peter Trower in Gibsons, 2005. (Photo: Vancouver Sun)

show, he began turning this apparent dilemma over in his mind. On the one hand he'd save the bus fare – even though it was senior's discount day – to Park Royal; on the other, he might be seen in the car by someone that recognized him.

The light bulb came on. "You can drop me two blocks from Park Royal."

I mention these kinds of things because I want to make it clear that the great poems were written by a flesh and blood human, a complicated one, and not by the wild yet cuddly paragon that he is so often made out to be. That kind of man could never have produced that kind of work.

All that stuff is finally of little importance. If you were his friend you accepted that he was very much like an unruly child. You might remember him throwing the bowl of prunes across the room but it was no big deal, really; you could clean the rug and your shirt, and it's funny in retrospect.

I have a thousand anecdotes about him.

We were both, by choice, outside the Literary establishment, both the standard one and the much more conservative avant garde; neither of us played the game and cozied up to those in charge. We admired many of the same writers and had insights into each other's work. Pete was surprised when I told him I suspected Gerald Manley Hopkins was his big influence, even more than Dylan Thomas or Robert Swanson. When I said that, he glanced furtively around the empty room as if a literary critic might be hiding behind the dilapidated couch with a tape recorder.

He only read work by English and American writers. Try as I might, I couldn't get him to try Dostoevski, Celine or even Knut Hamsun, whom I was sure he'd like. Same thing with Rilke. And he absolutely refused to have anything to do with Li Po or Catullus, Villon or Rimbaud. Pete's excuse was always, "It's not right to read them in translation."

Movies played a big part in our conversations. Pete particularly admired westerns – he called them Dusters. He read show biz biographies and bought super market movie magazines.

It is music that was our strongest connection. Neither of us had ever encountered anyone else whose tastes were so close to his own. We would even discuss the covers of old jazz and R&B albums we had owned in long gone decades, citing precise visual details like the stuffed Nazi officer on the Thelonious Monk album cover and the framed photo of Jack Kerouac on the stripper's counter on Tom Waits' Small Change. Pete is still the only other person I've ever met who could recite verbatim the hustler's prologue to Lou Rawls' classic "Living Double" (in a great big world of trouble.)

He was hung up on Tom Waits. When I told him I was going to interview Waits on the phone Pete was excited and insisted on being there to talk to "Tommy." A hundred times he asked me, "Where? When?" I envisioned a disaster and used the home phone of someone Pete didn't know.

The only things we ever disagreed on, musically, beside foreign singers- he wouldn't listen to them, not even Edith Piaf or Paolo Conti- were Frankie Laine and



Peter Trower with Jim Christy

Elvis Presley. I liked the latter; Pete didn't but was obsessed with the former. He made fun of "Blue Moon of Kentucky" and I told him Frankie Lane (Francesco Paolo lo Vecchio) singing "Why Must I Be So Black and Blue" was seriously embarrassing.

The music and tipping sessions were always at his apartment; he rarely visited anyone else other than Yvonne. You had to come to him. He lived in a duplex owned by his brother. You opened the door to the smell of stale beer. On the stairway dozens of empty beer cans and bottles seemed to be climbing the steps on that carpet that could never possibly be cleaned. I was always reminded of the 'taproom' owned by two of my uncles in Philadelphia. As a kid I'd play on the floor in the sawdust and study the moves and speech of all the molls and Wise Guys. There were few Mob figures at Pete's apartment, but there was the same stale beer smell. There weren't as many females either.

In his washroom there was usually a once white t-shirt gone grey, and yellowing around the neck, that hung over the shower rod to dry.

For a couple of years he rented a room to an old newspaper columnist from Ottawa named Stewart Nutter. Stewart died in that room and it was only then that we discovered he had been a much-decorated fighter pilot in the Second World War. Peter had never completely warmed to Stewart, perhaps because his own father was a pilot during the same era but had been killed when he crashed his plane.

I recall few writers being at his afternoon sessions. Besides Stewart and John Moore, I only remember Joe Ferrone and Al Maclachlan. Greg Potter once came over from the city to interview him.

I recently ran into the painter Maurice Spira, from Roberts Creek, who reminisced about spending one great afternoon at the apartment drinking beer with Pete and painting his portrait. Otherwise his visitors were not connected with the Arts. The steady ones were Marilyn Browning, who was a local actress but worked as supplies manager at the Sechelt hospital and the only regular female visitor; Steve Major, a



Peter Trower (centre) with Joe Ferrone and Jim Christy

foundry worker would be there, as well as Paul Murphy.

Of course, I was not there every afternoon for every session. Just twice a week when not travelling.

Few other females appeared. Pete was not at ease with women until he'd had a load on and began proclaiming their beauty and soliciting kisses.

I was back East for a decade during which time Brad Benson, a carpenter and photographer who had been an occasional visitor to the apartment began showing up regularly. Brad told me he went for the stories and because Pete was a real writer, an old-fashioned one who eschewed 'networking' and promoting himself.

But Pete was also secretive and had things going on that few knew about. Just a few years ago I met a woman on, but who had several scrapbooks filled with photographs of the two of them as well as love letters he'd written to her.

Before the couch at his place was a low coffee table that held the typewriter. From his place on that filthy piece of furniture that not even the Salvation Army in Tegucigalpa would have considered, Pete had to bend forward to attack his typewriter which really did face the East so he appeared very much the dedicated supplicant writing his sacred verse. I never saw him sit anywhere else. His guests had to make do with crooked often armless hardback chairs that never had all the legs they were supposed to have.

Hopefully some day that room will be reproduced in a museum.

Pete wrote in the early morning and didn't begin receiving visitors until one in the afternoon by which time he was into his second beer. You had to get him when he'd had the first but before the fourth. He was too nervous and uptight before the second and babbling by the fourth but in between he was the best of company.

He talked a lot about characters he'd met in the woods but never about the woods work itself. Only now and again would he reminisce about the early days in Gibsons and Port Mellon; it was as if he was saving it all for his writing.

He did save it and, of course, we're the better for it. The logging, the drinking, the hotel rooms, the "sliding back hills," the "slack assed spring" and the "house limned with whispering light". He swooned over "Shapely Sherry" and loved "gentle Karen" with whom he "toasted the last hurrah of romance/counted the disappearing fantasies/all the west wheeling night."

Although Pete for the most part scorned what passes for the Literary establishment in Canada, this is not to say he didn't hunger for its approbation. But those people paid him scant attention unless it was to skewer him with snide comments. I recall a reading of Pete's where I happened to sit near a Governor General's Award-winning poet who twisted his face in sarcasm while mimicking Pete's line about "a girl to walk the weathers with."

The regular writers, the ones who win awards, get big grants and soft teaching gigs attain their exalted positions by not taking chances, by not writing about cocktail waitresses and whistle punks, about Granddaddy Toughs and Whispering Chesters, and certainly by not being so crass as to infuse their work with lyricism and a little rhythm – Pete couldn't understand these people.

Pete referred to the work of most of his contemporaries as "ethereal bullshit."

One poet who took some notice of him was Al Purdy, and Pete was immensely proud of Purdy's introduction to *Chainsaws in the Cathedral*. In person, however, Purdy condescended to him. But to my mind, Pete was the superior poet. Purdy was obvious and predictable. Also, he has a tin ear while Trower sings.

There is a lot of talk back east, in Southern Ontario poetry circles, especially, of People's Poetry and who is a genuine People's Poet. Many names have been put forth for this honour but never Peter Trower's. I found him to be almost completely unknown back there. Other than Len Gasparini, another kindred soul, not one person knew who he was.

People's poetry is evidently non-academic, yet presumably must have literary merit. It is thought that people's poetry must have an overtly political message as if one were required to mention native people and the glory of nature to qualify; Also it helps to sprinkle in lame slogans and hackneyed pronouncements, maybe about shamans, elders and various – any – oppressed peoples and then you're writing People's Poetry. First off, this kind of thing is considered leftist – which disqualifies Peter Trower's work right there.

To my mind the best political poetry, people's poetry, is great poetry no matter the subject. Once when Kenneth Rexroth was about to begin reading to an audience, he asked "What do you want? Romance or Revolution?" Someone in the crowd called back at him, "What's the difference?"

To my mind the greatest People's Poet in America during the early Twentieth Century was Stephen Vincent Benet. His "American Names" with its devastating last line would be successful anywhere among any people.

Nor do they read Kenneth Fearing, a satirist of mid-century American life, each long-line poem a condemnation of it.

I hope the same fate, the one of historic neglect, does not meet the work of my old friend who is the premier people's poet of the last hundred years in this county. In fact, I'll go so far as to say he is a better poet than Milton Acorn who otherwise has no peers. Peter's work is more important because, again, it's the music.

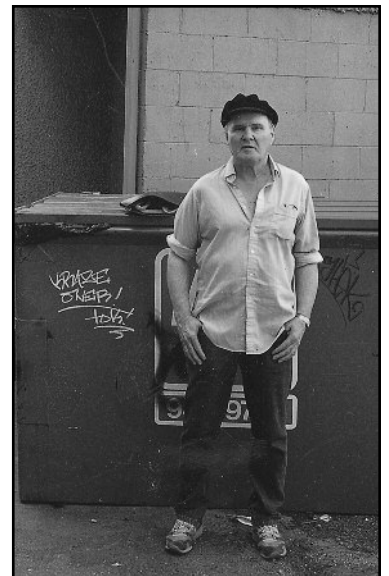
Ah, he was just so different than the rest of them, and not only his verse. First off, how many poets would show up to read wearing pleated dress trousers?

He was one-of-a-kind and unpredictable. Although I emphasized his stinginess it is also true that during his last years he gave several thousand dollars to a bar maid who told him a sob story.

Ultimately his life and his work come together and to understand one you have to know the other. He is indeed a legend. I once wrote to advise people to keep an eye on him, pay close attention because he wouldn't be around forever, and you'll want to be able to say, "I saw Pete Trower."

I saw Pete Trower.

I knew the guy.



Peter Trower

The author of more than thirty books, including poetry, short stories, novels, travel and biography, Jim Christy's recent publications include the poetry book *The Big Thirst* (Ekstasis Editions, 2014) and the nonfiction book *Rogues, Rascals, and Scalawags Too* (Anvil Press, 2015).

A TRIBUTE TO LARRY EIGNER (AUGUST 7, 1927 - FEBRUARY 3, 1996): THE LAST TEN YEARS

Jack Foley

Within the confines of my little brain.
There seems to be a world of my own making.
—Larry Eigner, “Sonnet” (April, 1945)

I am omnipresent to some extent
—Larry Eigner, “B” (c. 1952-53)

Calligraphy Typewriters, a new selected poems of the work of Larry Eigner, has recently appeared from The University of Alabama Press. Edited by Curtis Faville and Bob Grenier, it is a most welcome volume. The four-volume *Collected Poems*, published in 2010 by Stanford University Press, was a boon to scholars but no gift to the ordinary poetry lover. As the editors point out, “a selected poems was needed to concentrate and focus Eigner’s life’s work, so that many of the best poems could be held in the hands, and *experienced*, in one book.” The book, itself weighing in at over 300 pages, has a foreword by Charles Bernstein, who writes, “despite legions of fervent readers, Eigner’s magisterial four-volume, almost 2,000-page *Collected Poems*, received virtually no public recognition when it was published... With this volume, *Collected* editors Robert Grenier and Curtis Faville have created a perfectly scaled introduction to the full scope of Eigner’s work.”

I remember someone—perhaps Michael McClure—telling me that his first experience of Larry Eigner’s work stunned him: “It was like experiencing the consciousness of a Martian, someone living entirely outside the human world.” Larry, who was in many ways a modest, ordinary man, would have been amused by such a designation, but the originality—one might say the *strangeness*—of his work is definitely a factor in its reception. His poetry has charm, wit, cleverness, depth, music—but it also has what Bernstein calls “sudden paratactic leaps / syntactic-synaptic jump cuts.” It seems almost entirely lacking in the sentimentality—and the I-centeredness—that is a feature of most “popular” poetry, even popular poetry of considerable quality.

I hope this book, described by Larry’s sister-in-law Beverly Eigner as “a labor of love,” will find the wider audience Eigner’s work deserves. The poems are here, and they are rich and wonderful. Bernstein’s foreword is helpful in some ways, but he is unfortunately given to language like this:

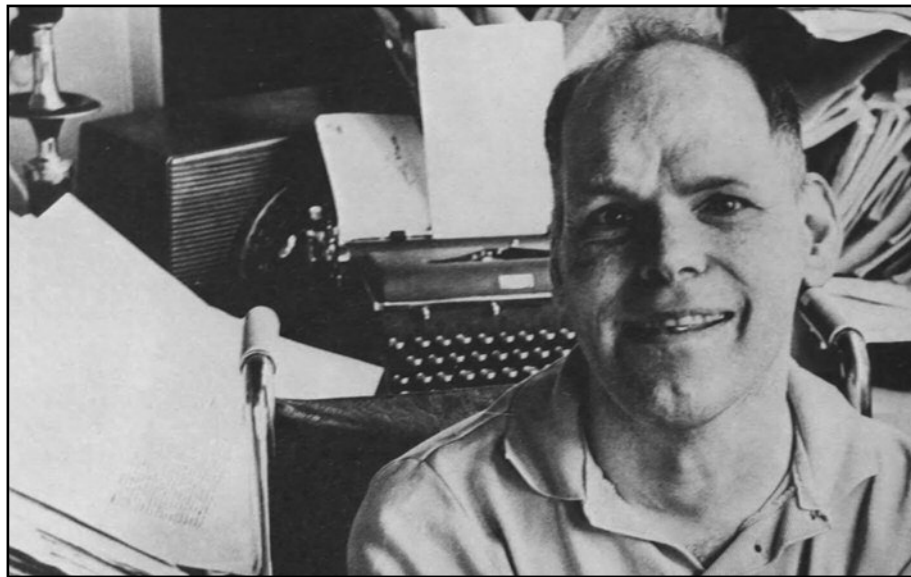
“Eigner’s sudden paratactic leaps / syntactic-synaptic jump cuts—the basic prosodic movement of his poems—are electrifying. Following Dominique Fourcade, I think of Manet’s motto ‘Tout arrive’—everything happens in the blank space of the page. In place of the poem as a record of psychodrama beyond the poem, action in Eigner arrives at the level of the phrasal hinge: a reinsistent prosody of shift / displacement / reconstellation. *Textual slivers shimmer*. The poet drops away as the world keeps arriving: a be-in of the beginnings of middlelessness (in medias res).”

I can imagine Larry’s reaction to that particularly purple passage: “Huh?” Bernstein’s points are in fact well taken, but they are presented in a language that the poet himself would never have understood or even approved of. There is a subtext throughout that says: “Look how smart I am, look how many books I have read: behold my phrasal hinge.”

Still, the poems are there, and they are well worth turning the page to discover.

*

I met Larry Eigner in 1986, when I was putting on a poetry series at Larry Blake’s restaurant in Berkeley, 2367 Telegraph Avenue. I had heard of Larry from Ron Silliman and had seen some of his work in *This* magazine—as well as in some other magazines. The poems impressed me enough to buy some of his books, available at Small Press Distribution in Berkeley. I knew that Larry was disabled, but I didn’t know that the disability extended to his speech. When I told Barrett Watten that I wanted to contact Larry to read in my series, Barrett—perhaps as a joke—gave me Larry’s phone number and no other information. When I dialed the number, the answer I heard was far from the expected “hello”; I suddenly understood that Larry had a speech impediment! I remember a feeling of panic and then a feeling of determination: I resolved to understand this man. Larry’s caregiver, Kathleen Frumkin told me some time later that she was standing by the phone and would have helped me had I needed it. But I didn’t need it. By the time the conversation was over, Larry and I had agreed upon a



Larry Eigner

time when he would read at my series and he had given me his address: 2338 McGee in Berkeley. We arranged a time when I could visit.

I arrived at Larry’s house with a loaf of Irish soda bread under my arm, and we began a conversation that didn’t end until his death ten years later. We talked about *Charles Olson* and *Hart Crane* and *William Carlos Williams*—all magical names for Larry—but we also talked about Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Laughing, we both quoted from “A Psalm of Life”: “Life is real! Life is earnest! And the grave is not its goal....” We discovered that the month and day of our births were close (his August 7, mine August 9), though we were born thirteen years apart. (Some years later—on August 10, 1994—we held a large joint birthday party: many friends, including Michael and Amy McClure, attended.) When I told Larry I had been laboring in graduate school and had suddenly come upon Olson’s *Maximus Poems*, he said, “Oh, oh!”—rightly, because Olson was definitely a factor in my leaving graduate school. It was a wonderful meeting, and I found that I could understand Larry’s speech in person as easily as I had on the phone. When my first book, *Letters / Lights—Words for Adelle*, was about to be published, I asked Larry for a blurb; he responded with a preface (dated September 18, 1986). As his books appeared, I attempted to review them whenever I could.

Larry gave a reading soon after our meeting—at “Leona’s,” upstairs at Larry Blake’s. Ignoring fire laws, we carried him up the stairs. The room was full of Eigner fans, many of them the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets who were actively supporting his work. (Ron Silliman dedicated *In the American Tree*, his 1986 anthology of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, to Larry; Larry found out about it only when Ron handed him the book at Leona’s.) After the reading, Larry told me he wanted to return next week. “Here’s my two bucks. I’ll be here next week.” I told him to keep his two bucks, I’d be happy to bring him for free, and so I did, throughout the run of my series. I don’t have a record of the exact date of Larry’s 1986 reading, but he was reading again at my series on June 29, 1987. This time he had a co-reader: Kathleen Frumkin. On August 7th of the next year, we had a special birthday celebration and reading.

Bringing Larry to Leona’s and later to the Café Milano on Bancroft Way (where I moved the series in 1988) exposed him to an extraordinarily wide range of poets. Of course he chatted with the people helping me with the series: my wife Adelle, Ann Sherman, Richard Loranger and Jesse Beagle, all of whom felt considerable affection for him. But he also chatted with the featured poets—usually with my help. (I remember that Robert Bly once grasped my shoulder to make certain I didn’t go away while he conversed with Larry.) Among the poets presented were Q.R. Hand, Reginald Lockett, Bruce Isaacson (of Café Babar fame), Ivan Argüelles, Julia Vinograd, Bob Perelman, Mary Rudge, Neeli Cherkovski, David Fisher, Fritz Leiber, Andrew Joron, Robert Pinsky, Michael Palmer, Carolyn Kizer, Robert Hass, H.D. Moe, Paul Landry, Ishmael Reed, Al Young, Crag Hill, Tom Clark, Diane di Prima, Lucille Clifton, Richard Silberg, Joyce Jenkins, Canadian Victor Coleman, Floyd Salas, Thom Gunn, Dale Jensen, Herman Berlandt, Barrett Watten, Susan Griffin, Joanna Griffin, Judy Grahn, Eduard

Roditi, Lyn Hejinian, Kit Robinson, Frank Moore, Donald Schenker, Robert Peters, Jack Micheline, Paula Gunn Allen, Diane Wakoski, Robert Glück, the rap group Shocking U, Joie Cook, Leslie Scalapino, Paul Mariah, Brenda Hillman, James Broughton, Carlota Caulfield, Stanley McNail, Jerry Ratch, Ron Silliman, and many others. Larry believed that there was a correlation between cerebral palsy and “some kinds of hearing problems.” In an effort to hear better, he often moved closer to the person reading. He then closed his eyes to concentrate on what the person was saying. Unfortunately, when his eyes were closed, he usually fell asleep, and when he fell asleep, he snored—more or less in the face of the poet reading. I woke him gently, as he exclaimed, “Huhhhh?” Larry wrote of his experience at Larry Blake’s and The Café Milano:

fight the background
chatter as
the people
eat more

and there’s the music
across the street

or listen in

why not

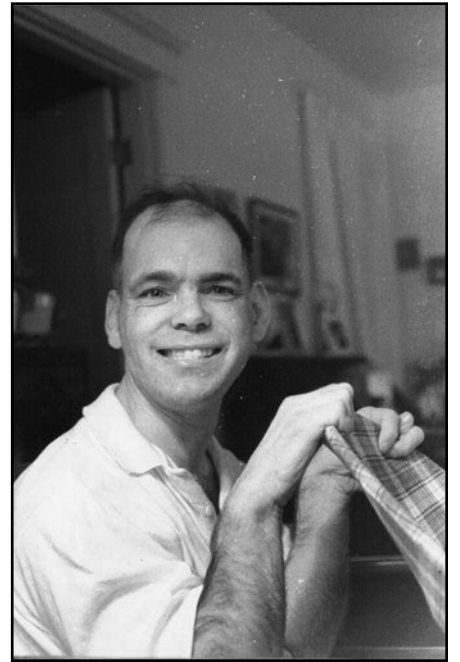
I ended the series in 1988, when I began to broadcast poetry on radio station KPFA. I had brought Larry to every one of the readings I presented since meeting him. Now, it was necessary to make another arrangement. I decided to visit Larry once a week, so I spent one evening a week at 2338 McGee. We talked, often with contributions from Larry’s neighbor Jay Rynek and caregivers Albert Gwynn, Merek Pacholec, Charles Alexander, and Monica Novak. At times I would bring a friend. The subjects varied—questions Larry had been considering, opinions ventured by the caregivers, books or television shows Larry had come upon—and the discussions were sometimes fairly intense. He often remarked about his vast “curiosity,” and he loved to think about things, to discuss. Bob Grenier, busy with other things at that time, never participated in these sessions. I also took Larry to various places, sometimes at his request: poetry readings, movies, lectures. I remember taking him to the 1989 film, *My Left Foot*, which dealt with the life of Christy Brown, like Larry a cerebral palsy victim. The only theatre showing the film in “wheelchair accessible” Berkeley was showing it upstairs, where no wheelchair could go. I drove Larry to near-by Emeryville to see the film and wrote an angry letter to the theater and to the mayor of Berkeley.



Larry Eigner, Robert Duncan, and Alberto de Lacerda, Golden Gate Park, 1967

In the late 1980s we both participated in a film class taught by Ellen Drori at UC Extension. Larry made many excited comments during the discussion sessions but would always be silent when I asked him to stop and let someone else speak. Ellen grew immensely fond of Larry, and the class found him both puzzling and charming. The last film we saw together—and, I believe, the last film Larry saw—was the wonderful *Il Postino*. Larry remarked, “Pretty good”—high praise from Larry. In 1989, I transcribed as much as I could of the 1973 film, *Getting It Together, A Film on Larry Eigner* made by Leonard Henny and Jan Boon. The film featured both Larry and Allen Ginsberg reading Larry’s poems. I asked Larry to comment on some of the things said about him by Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg remarks, “Ah, obviously the form of the verse is dictated by [Eigner’s] physical condition of slow hesitancy and difficulty in maintaining his hand

steady to write words. And as the words come swiftly through his mind he has to stop his whole thought process to write down a word while thoughts are going on still.” Larry comments, “Obvious maybe but not too good a guess.” About his typing Larry said, “I type often enough and/or fast enough with just my right index finger, my thumb on the spacebar, lifting it and coming down with every stroke on a key, so I hardly need to look at the keyboard.” Larry’s first poetry reading is captured in the film. Though he seems to be enjoying the event—he laughs at certain points—he comments that he was in fact “nervous distracted and bewildered” and that the laughter was simply a nervous reaction. The transcription of *Getting It Together* was published in a 1992 issue of a magazine I edited, *Poetry USA*; it included some interesting photographs of Larry by Ania Kaminska. It was later republished, without the photographs, in volume 23 of Gale Research’s *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series* (1996).



Larry Eigner circa 1950

Larry used to listen to the radio all the time—and he would often phone me at odd hours to tell me about a radio or television program that might interest me. I wanted very much to put Larry on the radio. The problem was that he tended to flail about with his hands and would knock over a microphone stand. Finally, KPFA programmer Ben Lindgren and I brought him into the station’s recording studio and hung a microphone *above* him. That solved the problem. On March 9, 1994, I recorded an hour-long interview with him—with me “translating” his answers. The interview was broadcast on August 8, 1994, the day after Larry’s sixty-seventh birthday. I knew that he frequently referred to himself as a “retired” poet, so at the end of the interview I asked him whether he still considered himself a poet. He answered enigmatically, “Nobody’s a poet when he’s asleep”—and then read one more poem. (I thought of but didn’t mention Coleridge’s dream poem, “Kubla Khan.”)

I brought Larry to his last public appearance, a tribute to Gertrude Stein which Lyn Hejinian presented at New College of California in November, 1995. His last interview was a videoconference conducted by editor Shelly Andrews for the *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series* on December 29, 1995. Also present were myself and Richard and Beverly Eigner. A transcription of the interview was included in Larry’s entry in the *Contemporary Authors* series, completed after his death by Shelly Andrews and me.

It was during one of the sessions at 2338 McGee that Larry told me that he felt Bob Grenier had been the best friend of his life. He also asked me several times to teach him about L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry. L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets had been Larry’s staunchest defenders, but he complained that he could rarely understand their work. “Maybe you can explain it to me.” I did what I could to enlighten Larry. He told me he was fearful that if L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets discovered that he didn’t understand—or perhaps disliked—their work, they might drop him. I reassured him that that wouldn’t be the case, but the fear—the uncertainty—remained. Indecisiveness about a subject was often Larry’s condition. Once, when he had completely contradicted himself about something and saw that I noticed it, he said to me, “You know me, I can never make up my mind about anything... Negative Capability!”—though he also thought it possible that such indecisiveness was characteristic of people with cerebral palsy, who “have short attention spans.” At the heart of Larry’s work is a powerful, generating confusion, a deep uncertainty. The poetry is often a testing of the real. He moves, he wrote, “step by step, among uncertainties enough in the world.” He once remarked ruefully that as a victim of cerebral palsy he had never held a job, had always been cared for by others: “It’s a long childhood I’ve had.”

My book, *Exiles*, was at Larry’s bedside during the last conscious week of his life.

After Larry’s death, Charles Bernstein wrote, “His will to think was unsuppressible.” I answered, “Yes, but so was his will to speak—to speak in any manner he could. You’ve been with Larry and know how he would talk all the time. His writing, with all its silences, necessarily partook of that urge towards talk. People complained of it—accused him of ‘monologuing.’ Yet there it was, at his very center, controlled in certain ways but in others not. Hard to think of him silent.”

Here are three poems by Larry—the first “the knowledge of death” (a major theme in his work):

the knowledge of death, and now
knowledge of the stars

there is one end

and the endless

Room at the center

passage /in no time

a rail thickets hills grass

This is his "Letter for Duncan," addressed to the great California poet, Robert Duncan:

just because I forget
to perch different ways
the fish
go monotonous

the
sudden hulks of the trees
in a glorious summer

you don't realize
how mature you get
at 21

but you look back

wherever a summer
continue 70 seasons

this one
has been so various

was the spring hot?

every habit

to read

nothing you've done you have

older

the fish
can't bother screaming

flap by hook

the working pain

jaws by trying a head bodies

you'll always go to sleep
more times than you'll wake

Larry asked me, "How many more times?" I answered correctly, "One."

Finally, this is the title poem to his marvelous volume, *Another Time in Fragments* (Fulcrum, 1967). Robert Duncan contributed a lengthy blurb to this book: "Larry Eigner has suggested a new development of [William Carlos] Williams's line: his phrasings are not broken off in an abrupt juncture but hover, having a margin of their own—stanzaic phrases—suspended in their own time within the time of the poem; as, in turn, each poem, the immediate occasion of Eigner's life consciousness, has a time of its own in the continuity of poems."

Again dawn

the sky dropped
its invisible whiteness

we saw pass out
nowhere

empty the blue

stars

our summer
on the ground

like last night another
time

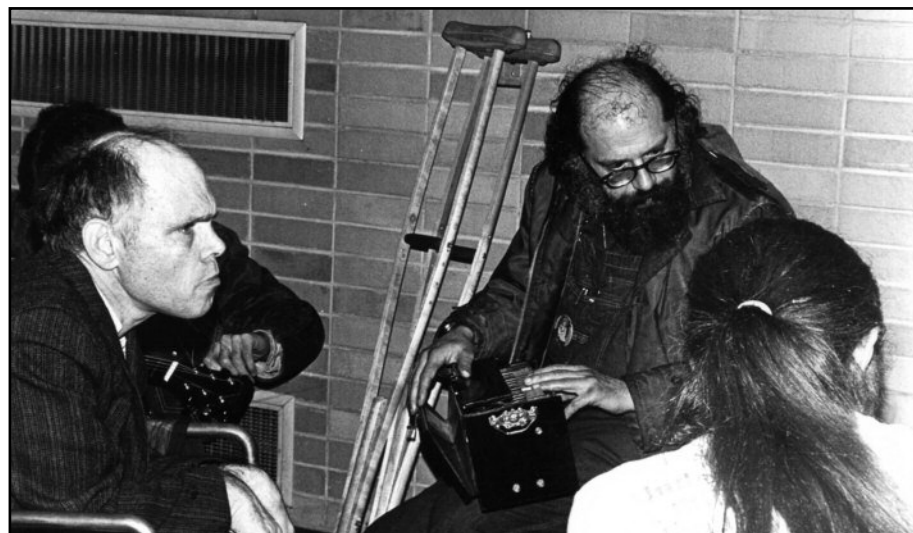
in fragments

"Another time": Larry carefully dated every one of his poems.

*

Though Larry read widely and was interested in various kinds of poetry, the work of Charles Olson (1910-1970) probably exerted the greatest influence on his verse. Eigner's biographer, Jennifer Bartlett, has observed that Larry was "obsessed" by Olson.

In a famous passage from *Call Me Ishmael* (1947), Olson writes, "I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America, from Folsom cave to now. I spell it large because it comes large here. Large, and without mercy." Olson's revolutionary "spatial"



Larry Eigner, Allen Ginsberg, and Peter Orlovsky

poetics has its ancestor in Stéphane Mallarmé's great poem, *Un coup de dés* (1897), *A Throw of the Dice*. *Wikipedia*: "It has been suggested that 'much of Mallarmé's work influenced the conception of , with his purposeful use of blank space and careful placement of words on the page, allowing multiple non-linear readings of the text. This becomes very apparent in his work *Un coup de dés*.'" What is said here of Mallarmé's work is in many ways true of Olson's as well. One difference is that Olson's conception remains bound to the individual page whereas Mallarmé's poem is conceived of as occurring within the open pages of a book, so that a phrase occurring on the left-hand page may be continued on the right. Constantly aware of the sea-faring history of his town, his "root place," Gloucester, Massachusetts, Olson imaginatively reconfigures the Mallarmean page as a kind of "map"—his term is "mappemunde" ("I am making a mappemunde. It is to include my being")—in which "geography," the physical relationship of the words on the page to one another, is all-important. Echoing Alfred North Whitehead's *Adventures in Ideas* and thinking of himself as a kind of Carl Sauer of poetry, Olson writes,

An American

is a complex of occasions,

themselves a geometry

of spatial nature.
 I have this sense,
 that I am one
 with my skin
 Plus this—plus this:
 that forever the geography
 which leans in
 on me I compel
 backwards I compel Gloucester
 to yield, to
 change
 Polis
 is this
 (“*Maximus to Gloucester*, Letter 27 [withheld]”)

All of these elements are present in Eigner’s more personal work, limited to what he could discover in his immediate environment and lacking both Olson’s overriding historical consciousness and his interest in making anything or anyone “yield.” If Olson wrote long works—*Maximus*—Larry concentrated on the sotto voce:

I’m cautious, and come onto things by under-statement. Wary of exaggeration.
 Sotto voce has resulted in the suppression of words. Don’t like to begin with a big **B**, as if I was at the **B**eginning of all speech, or anything; which may also have something to do with why usually I’ve had an aversion more or less to going back to the left margin after beginning a poem, but otherwise than in hindsight I just tried to do the best I could, the simplest and most immediate thing being punctuation, once words were forceful enough—a matter of getting the distances between words, and usage of marks to conform as well as might be to what there was to say, as spoken, then these typographical devices entering themselves into the discovery and the initiation of attention...Oaks from small acorns. Forests of possibility.

“Possibility” is the central issue. If Larry could be “nervous distracted and bewildered”—deeply confused—that negative condition might have its positive correlative in an extraordinary openness to absolutely anything, to a kind of all-embracing “Negative Capability”: “that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason—Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetratum of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge” (John Keats, 1817).

This state of “uncertainty”—sometimes disguised by a badgering tone—is also a characteristic of Charles Olson’s verse. If he insists on SPACE in *Call Me Ishmael*, Olson also revealed to Barry Miles, who was recording him for a reading eventually released on the Folkways label, that he had currently shifted his attention away from “SPACE” and was now occupied by time. (Later *Maximus* poems are, like Larry Eigner’s poems, frequently and carefully dated.) The opening line of Olson’s “The Kingfishers” is often quoted and discussed as a way to understand this poet’s work:

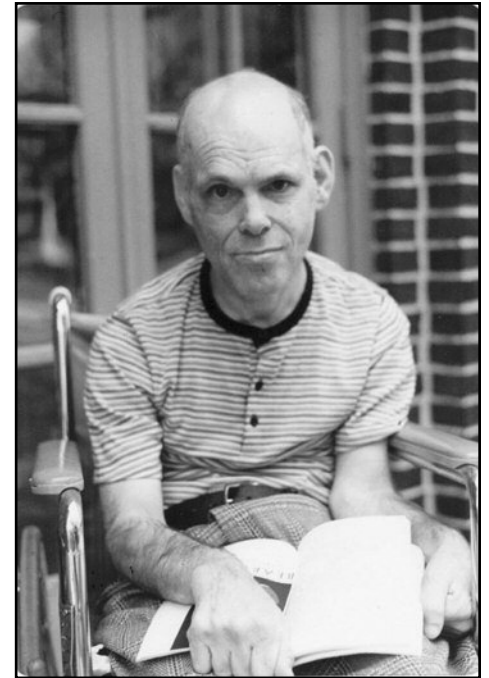
What does not change / is the will to change

Further on in the poem, Olson insists that “change” is the “very thing you are.” Yet critics rarely mention this passage from “*Maximus to Gloucester*, Letter 2”:

people

don’t change. They only stand more
 revealed. I,
 likewise

Because of Olson’s considerable tendency toward the didactic, people are often at great pains to elucidate his “message.” But the fact is that if we consider Olson’s work as a whole, we will find that there are a great many contradictions in it, and that the contradictions are a part of its strength. Olson definitely had a tendency towards the didactic, but the very openness of his mind meant that at some point or another he was very likely to contradict what he was being didactic about. The same poet who issued the command, “(boundary / Disappear” in “at the boundary of the mighty world” (*Maximus IV, V, VI*) asserted that “Limits / are what any of us / are inside of” in *Maximus* “Letter 3.” This poet was not a consistent, systematic thinker: rather, he was an advocate for consciousness itself—for mental movement. Philip Whalen’s famous formulation, made in his remarks for *The New American Poetry* (1960), “This poetry is a picture or graph of the mind moving,” is an exact description of the poetry of both Charles Olson and Larry Eigner. It is in Olson’s poetry that Larry discovered a kindred soul—someone who was, like him, deeply, essentially, confused, bewildered, open.



Larry Eigner in 1978

In his book *The Muse Learns To Write* (1986), Eric A. Havelock reflects upon the new interest in orality which has characterized much scholarship in the past twenty-five to thirty years. Why, he asks, “should...works produced simultaneously in three different countries have all involved themselves in the role of human language in human culture? Why, in particular, this focus on the spoken language in contrast to the written?” His answer is: “We had all been listening to the radio....”

So was Larry Eigner. Radio is a medium of disparate voices asserting themselves in various contexts. It is in this sense fundamentally democratic. So is the poetry of Larry Eigner. What Duncan calls “stanzaic phrases” become, in the context of speech, disparate voices. What is the relationship of

you don’t realize
 how mature you get
 at 21
 but you look back
 wherever a summer
 continue 70 seasons
 this one
 has been so various
 was the spring hot?
 to
 the fish
 can’t bother screaming
 flap by hook ?

It can be put in another way: What does it mean to be human in a situation of multimedia, of multicultural, of multiplicity—a situation in which the word “many” has been almost entirely replaced by the word “multiple”? (“I went to the theater multiple times”—not “many times.”) The electronic media have changed not only the conditions

of writing but the conditions of consciousness itself, though the exact nature of that change is not yet clear. We live, Father Walter J. Ong remarked in 1977, in an “opening state of consciousness” (*Interfaces of the Word*). That opening state can be studied with profit in the luminous, confused, ever interested, ever interesting, always democratic work of Larry Eigner, who often claimed, “I never get bored because I’m interested in everything.” “The universe is one being,” wrote the great Turkish novelist, Elif Shafak. “Everything and everyone is interconnected through an invisible web of stories. Whether we are aware of it or not, we are all in a silent conversation” (*The Forty Rules of Love*). Larry Eigner’s work manifests exactly that condition though he put it slightly differently: “You know me, I can never make up my mind about anything...Negative Capability!”

That feeling, that openness gave Larry (and us) access to moments of extraordinary (and astonishing) beauty. A poem written from March 14 through March 24, 1967 begins,

The snow
 bank
 melts
 and by chance it is

 a caved shore

 a river bank

 white gulls come near
 at reduced speed

 flap through the
 trees just past
 the house appear

 so
 they live once
 the egg starts

 cloud, moving and none

 can stay put and
 be warm inside too long

 time lost
 life as cloud
 turned down past horizons rain
 shine allowing

 the sun through
 variously the light
 and warmth

 always somewhere or as long
 as we must think but birds

 It ends,

 and they move free

 gulls lining up
 facing the wind from the sea

 beautiful behinds

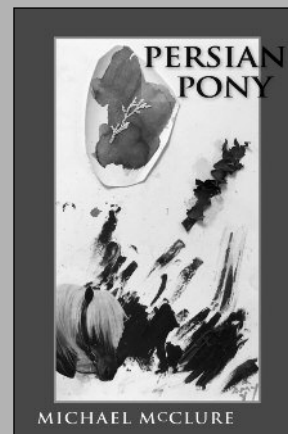
 from flight

 the snow like the sun to stare at

Jack Foley is a widely published San Francisco poet and critic. Foley’s recent, monumental *Visions & Affiliations: A California Literary Time Line 1940-2005* has received international attention and is recognized as an important compedium of California poetry. He lives in Oakland, Ca and June 5, 2010 was proclaimed “Jack Foley Day” in Berkley.

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~ Aram Saroyan, *The Village Voice*

Michael McClure is an award-winning American poet, playwright, songwriter, and novelist. A key figure of the Beat Generation, he also participated in the ’60s counterculture alongside musicians like Janis Joplin and Jim Morrison. McClure remains active as a poet, essayist, and playwright, and lives with his wife, Amy, in the San Francisco Bay area.

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TWO FROM ANVIL

Ryan Pastorchik

Jack Kerouac once offered Allen Ginsberg thirty beliefs and techniques on writing and these have circulated through the writing community ever since. I imagine the result should look something like *Escape from Wreck City*. This collection of poems rarely slows to a jog and keeps the reader off balance and on edge by cycling visions of beauty, dirty clothes, lusty hearts, tender fatherhood, and drugs. Not one poem is satisfied by a single reading.

Creary's work moves like a Ukrainian boxer; you are looking right at it as it sneaks out of vision then rings your ears. "The Great Northern Poem" leads the march with a sprinting depiction of something just beyond an outreached hand. Its hustling hop between nouns and images has a sense of purpose paradoxically stitched with non-sequiturs that results in an oddly inspiring piece of language. As with many of Creary's poems, I walk away smiling, wondering what trick was just pulled on me.

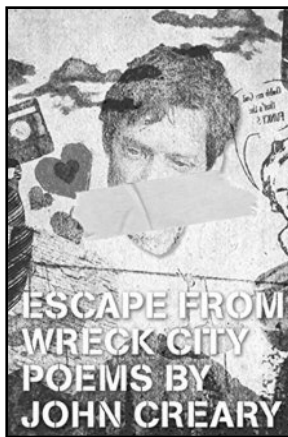
Creary's debut collection reveals a comfort with variety. There is a clear default to couplets, but his poems frequently move into creative structures that allow for playful interpretations of the language. "Nitpicking and Cantankerous Quarrelling" is a bantering, relatable dialogue between an assumedly married couple. The poem is formatted into two columns, each one representing the jabs of a spouse. Read left to right, top to bottom, the poem is a belt-fed argument with spittle on the lips. Read top to bottom, column one then column two, the poem becomes a pair of boiling internal thoughts punctuated by love.

Comparatively, the narrative organization of "The Boy and the Bottomless Lake" leads to a rare pause in the racing pace of Creary's style (especially welcome after his relentless, raucous section III). Creary positions us further away from the subject of the poem and we watch the lonely isolation of a youth, friendly with the woods, his imagination, and not much else. The control and restraint shown here acknowledge the full tool belt with which Creary is building.

Juggled in the collection are celebrations of Creary's son. "September Eleventh Zygote" speaks to the birth of Nolan and the movements of a new father's mind. The stanzas shift quickly without ever letting go of the image of a father looking at his newborn child: "Hello, Little Little. Welcome." Creary speeds through the visions of delivery, the severing of the cord, and moves into descending testicles, cutting teeth, and shared scotch. After the flood of images that burst the dam upon looking at the newborn child, Creary returns to the full-hearted hopefulness of a new parent.

Throughout *Escape from Wreck City* there is an edgy, dangerous youthfulness that reminds me of scenes from Burroughs' *Junky* or Bukowski's *Ham on Rye*. "Blemish" is an unsettling example of this. IA clichéd vision of a parents-on-vacation house party, it's complete with refrigerator lawn ornaments, vomit, and the desperate, "emasculated host" watching in horror. Drugs, sex, and dirt under the fingernails are no strangers in *Escape from Wreck City*. Along with images of skateboards, happenstance duffle bag tourism, and backyard bonfires, the collection forms a Beat spirit mixed with paternal reflections and linguistic experimentation.

Creary's poetry reminds me of a time when being a poet could make you a celebrity, when it was cool to have literature in your back pocket. A time before technoliteracy and thumb-led conversations were the way stories were told, when people interacted with one another using eye contact and built stories around movement and action. The collection is exhausting in its pace and, at times, feels like the lubricated ramblings of a mad man, but it also screams with spirit and fight and feels like the first guest to a party that is going to get loud.



Escape from Wreck City
John Creary
Anvil, 2017



John Creary



Michael Dennis (photo: John W. MacDonald)

In his guest foreword, Stuart Ross claims that Dennis "lives, breathes and perhaps smokes poetry." This could be an understatement. The collection is loaded. It binds over 100 poems from 17 previous collections and 21 newly published pieces. *Bad Engine* is a thorough introduction to Dennis' work. He's an honest poet. I read "my mother and I sat waiting for death" with my pencil ready, scribbled in the margins, reread the poem and realized that the words were what the message was. Sure, there was more to it than simply what was on the page, but there was no attempted trickery, no fraudulent lines, no hidden hoax aimed at deception or mysterious secrecy. Dennis has memories to share, stories to tell, and poetry to write and he isn't hiding it behind anything. It was exciting to be able to pick any page in a book, read the poem, feel intimately aware of the vision, and leave with a scene rolling on my eyelids.

This honesty is sometimes startling. Dennis shares painful memories of an abusive uncle that aren't concealed or curtained. They are right there and so available that your organs flip in fear and anger. "where memories are made" is an example of this. Dennis sets you up with a swaying first stanza and then pins you to the ground before you've drawn a breath. As you struggle to right yourself, you can't help but notice that, not only is the poem raw and blunt in its content, it is so finely crafted that it is hard to turn away from. Like the memory it is pointing its finger at, the poem is haunting.

Throughout *Bad Engine*, Dennis' poems constantly remind us that every single thing can be magic. "breakfast in bed" offers a song of love and a glimpse of Venus through the heating of milk and juicing of oranges. Dennis doesn't hunt for things worth writing about; he has found a way to make all things worthy.

In a similar way, this collection equalizes everything. Death becomes an event not unlike tying your shoes, not unlike love. This isn't to say that Dennis doesn't celebrate love or honour death. Instead, his work carries a similar sentiment to *Siddhartha*: "The world is not imperfect. No, it is perfect at every moment...all small children are potential old men, all sucklings have death within them..." Despite this equalization, or maybe because of it, *Bad Engine* carries a feeling of optimism. Dennis covers racism, abuse, death, loss, insignificance, and the absurdity of humans throughout the collection and still leaves me in wonder at the poet's ability to delight in the world around him. Things that would not warrant mention to a stranger on the bus have been captured, displayed, and made memorable in Dennis' poetry.

Bad Engine is a collection of poems that takes a road trip through car crashes, wide-eyed memories, thrashing and thriving relationships, and the song of everyday. Michael Dennis reminds us that there are incredible, interesting, awful things happening all around and he is happy to watch and write about them as they enter his sightlines.

Ryan Pastorchik is working on his master's degree at SFU while teaching English and Trades in the Fraser Valley.

WHALE IN THE DOOR

Elise Roberts

When I first travelled west from Ontario as a young adventurer in 1976, I went to live in Squamish on Howe Sound. A squatter's cabin was available up the Cheakamus Canyon just past Cheekeye and on the journey in I had never before seen such stunning landscapes. I wondered how many millions of years it took for geological forces to construct this majestic place. I lived for a year hauling water from the Cheakamus River and chopping firewood in order to feel the essence of what it was to be west coast. It was there that I first felt the spirit of the land and the beautiful rain-forest, and how connected the Squamish/Skuxwu'u7mesh U'xuumixu people were to their land.

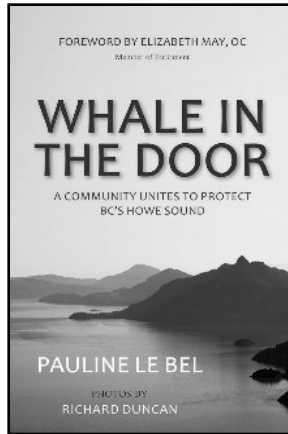
Most books about Howe Sound's history have been written from a colonial perspective. *Whale in the Door* speaks from the heart of the indigenous people and their intrinsic connection to this ancient land. The author brings to life the passion of the diverse people who live there and who come together to protect this sacred place. A massive export terminal for the liquefied natural gas industry is proposed for the Squamish area which would mean pipelines in the river estuaries and super-tankers navigating the waters of Howe Sound. Other proposals include a large-scale gravel export mine at McNab Creek. Yet, for decades people have worked tirelessly here to restore the incredible biodiversity of the area after a century of industry, mining and toxic waste spewing into these waters. Howe Sound needs more time to heal. Today, 29 organizations collaborate with the Squamish Nation to protect At'l'kitsem, Howe Sound.

The foreword by Canadian Green Party Leader Elizabeth May is especially informative. She shoots from the heart stating: "what is most disturbing is that the proposal for the new Howe Sound Woodfibre LNG Plant received federal approval before anyone could determine if LNG tankers could safely transit the area.....While an LNG accident would not coat our coastline with a toxic mess, a pierced hull could result in the LNG pooling above ocean water. As the LNG returns to its gaseous state, its volume would expand to six hundred times that of its liquid state, creating a highly dangerous vapour cloud floating over the ocean or depending on the wind over local communities."

When Joyce Williams of the Skwomesh Action Group summoned the wider community to march on the office of Woodfibre LNG, Le Bel—a journalist covering the story—travelled with a busload of citizens from Bowen Island. Her experience there evolved into the writing of this book.

Le Bel argues that we must understand the geological history of Howe Sound in order to understand the uniqueness of this place—from 9,000 year old Sponge Glass Reefs (long thought extinct), to the diversity of Porteau Cove, a shallow area of glacial gravel left behind as the ice began to recede. Divers and underwater photographers come from around the world to view its colourful species of rock fish, sea cucumber, sea anemone, starfish and other marine life.

Le Bel was given permission by local indigenous people to include an articulate description of Squamish nation people, their art, customs, food gathering, connection to the land, and the tragic impacts of colonialism on their people. A century ago, their land was confiscated for profitable industry and mining "for nothing in return." Their culture was devastated, their families ripped apart by residential schools. She maintains that the joining together of all Howe Sound people to support this cause is a step towards reconciliation.



Whale in the Door, A Community Unites to Protect BC's Howe Sound
Pauline Le Bel
Caitlin, 2017



Pauline Le Bel

Le Bel's writing takes us on a journey in learning about the restoration work of Howe Sound. She meets Edith Tobe, habitat biologist and learns about how salmon channels and eel grass beds are being restored in "one of the most productive estuaries in the world." Squamish Nation member Randall Lewis takes her on a tour of the revitalized Evans Creek to see evidence of a historic channel cut off by modern dykes: he tells her, "Because of the knowledge of the elders, we knew the channel was here." Le Bel also engages with citizen scientist John Buchanan whose films of underwater herring spawns provide an important record of the success of wrapping creosote pilings with landscape cloth to provide renewed spawning habitats. With the wild herring currently making a miraculous return to Howe Sound for the first time in decades, if they were to be turned back again it would be a tragedy for all the species that depend on them as a crucial link in the marine food web—the salmon, shorebirds, seals, sea lions.

The author also describes the work of Squamish Nation ethnobotanist Leigh Joseph whose vision is to return the traditional food-bulbs of the northern rice root in the Squamish River estuary, a traditional staple food of the Coast Salish.

And from Chris Lewis, a Squamish Nation Councillor, she learns the *Whale In The Door* legend of trickster Mink and his sister Skunk: they invite all the animals and critters from Howe Sound to visit, and provide them with a cedar box filled with water. Then they invite Whale who sticks his head into the door and traps everyone inside. Soon, the animals are forced to talk to each other—a metaphor for identifying common ground and sharing knowledge among people of differing views.

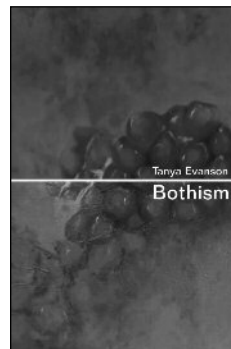
Le Bel's book is enough to generate alarm. Reading this emotional work makes me want to get involved and contribute where I can. Already I'm planning an early spring retreat to my spiritual place, a small quiet beach on the shores of Howe Sound where I'll be reading Le Bel's outstanding book again.

Elise Roberts is a community activist and organizer from B.C. and has been educating children about natural history through creative puppet theatre for two decades.

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BOTHISM

new poetry by
Tanya Evanson



ISBN 978-1-77171-219-4
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Bothism is an experimental Sufi text. It is both sorrow and joy, day and night, content and form, dot and circle, the threshold between worlds. It moves from unity to multiplicity and back again exploring that which can be split and reunited: a cell, a relationship, society, faith, time, words on the page. It posits that if one thing is true, then the opposite must also be true, and when asked to choose, the poet's answer is always both.

Tanya Evanson is an Antiguan-Canadian writer and performer from Tio'tia:ke/Montreal. She is a graduate of Concordia University Creative Writing and program director of Banff Centre Spoken Word. Evanson has released four audio recordings including ZENSHIP (2016) and recent spoken word performances include Suoni per il Popolo, Ubud Writers and Readers Festival, Tasmanian Poetry Festival, Edinburgh Book Festival and Glastonbury Festival. Her second book of poetry *Nouveau Griot* is forthcoming from Frontenac House in 2018. Evanson is a past recipient of the Golden Beret Award and was Poet of Honour at the 2013 Canadian Festival of Spoken Word. She moonlights as a whirling dervish.

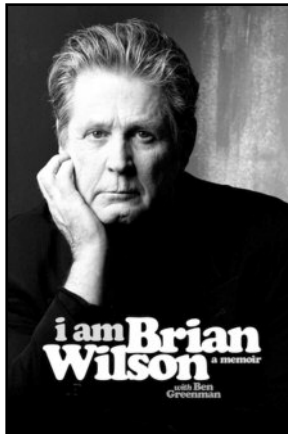


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I AM BRIAN WILSON

Joseph Blake

If you're interested in pop music and the Beach Boys' place in music history, or you just love a good story of triumph and tragedy and surprising rebirth, you'll love this autobiography by Beach Boys founder and pop savant, Brian Wilson. With writer Ben Greenman's help, Wilson tells the suburban, southern California band's story of big-selling hits, filial bonds, parental abuse (Wilson's music business-obsessed father was a violent, exacting stage parent.), and the songwriting bandleader's roller coaster ride of fame, artistic challenge, drug abuse, and mental illness. Driven crazy by the voices in his head and LSD-induced visions, Brian balloons to 300 pounds and never leaves his bedroom while his brother Dennis (the only surfer in the Beach Boys) is hanging out with Charlie Manson. It's a heck of a tale.



I Am Brian Wilson: A Memoir
Brian Wilson
with Ben Greenman
DaCapo, 320 p.

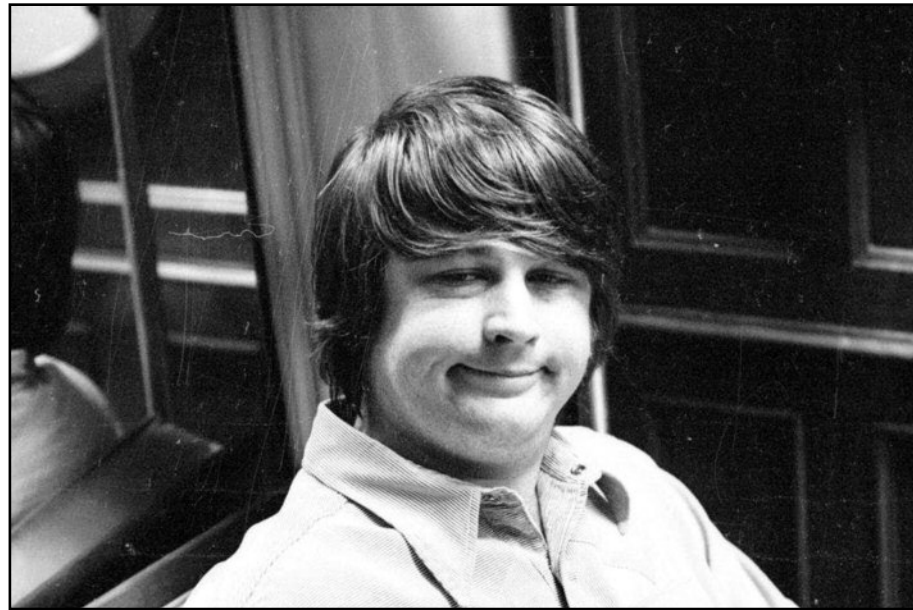
Last year's cinematic biography, *Love and Mercy* (also the title of one of Wilson's post-Beach Boys solo career standout songs) gave a credible shorthand version of Brian's story. His autobiography is much better. You can hear his fragile, childlike, sincere voice in these pages and almost see his twisted, stroke-like facial expressions and dead, sad eyes.

"Telling my story honestly means remembering things I sometimes prefer to forget," Wilson writes. "I would like people to know what I've gone through, and I hope that my story will give them strength."

I've always loved Brian's music, especially his masterful 1995 collaboration with fellow SoCal weirdo, Van Dyke Parks. It's called *Orange Crate Art*. Search it out. I also love the finally-released *Smile* and Wilson's singular artistic triumph, *Pet Sounds*.

Wilson calls *Smile* his "teenage symphony to God", and that's not a bad description of a work conceived at a grand piano plunked down in a sand pit in his front room and featuring a studio string section that Wilson decked out in toy fireman's hats to get into the mood to record his tune, *Fire*.

Phil Spector's wall of sound, George Martin's seminal Beatles arrangements, and the veteran studio band The Wrecking Crew all inspired Wilson's greatest songs including *Good Vibrations*, *God Only Knows*, and *Surf's Up* (to name only three I'd describe as near-perfect pop masterpieces.) The musical origins of his pop pocket



Brian Wilson

symphonies run through these pages, as does his candid, guileless telling of damaged relationships and artistic failure.

Band-mate-brothers Carl and Dennis Wilson are marked by their early deaths, and cousin and band front-man Mike Love comes across as an egotistical villain despite Brian's self-described effort to tell his narrative with honesty, perspective and forgiveness. He forgives his father and tries to understand the old man's madness, but has trouble forgiving rogue psychologist Gene Landy, another abusive father figure who completely took over Wilson's life for a decade with his 24-hour "therapy." Second wife, Melinda comes across as a straight-talking, clear-thinking heroine-savior spouse in the middle of the madness of Wilson's life.

In the book's prologue Wilson writes, "My story is a music story, a family story, and a love story, but it's a story of mental illness too." It's more than that too. Highly recommended.

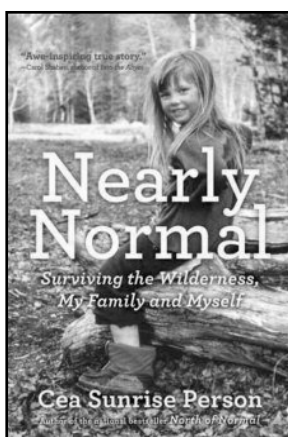
Joseph Blake is Music Editor for PRRB.

NEARLY NORMAL

Chelsea Pastorchik

Nearly Normal is the follow-up to Person's best-selling first memoir, *North of Normal*, published by Harper Collins in 2014. Where Person's first book recounted her childhood living in the wilderness with her dysfunctional family, this book focuses on the other facets of Person's life: her career as a model, her marriages, motherhood, her struggle as a writer, and, woven into every story, her attempts to reconcile with her childhood.

The most arresting element of this memoir is its brutal honesty. In this novel, Person shares the stories she was not ready to share in her first book. I could not imagine exposing such vulnerable pieces of myself to an audience, but Person expresses a deep desire to be honest with her readers. While she wrote her first book "to reach out to people like [herself] who felt like outsiders," she wrote this second book to free herself: "I will no longer live in shame." The experience for the reader is disconcerting. On the one hand, many of these stories feel too personal to



Nearly Normal
Cea Sunrise Person
Harper Collins, 2017

read, as though you are intruding where no one should. And yet, Person chose to share these stories, and, as she explains, sharing them is her way of gaining power over them. So, who am I then, to want to look away?

If this memoir is about sharing the most difficult stories from Person's past, it is also about celebrating her triumph over them. Writing this book, Person is happily married, a bestselling author, and mother to children who are healthy and well adjusted. At times, in particular at the beginning of the book before you come to know her, the reflections of this happy version of herself seem to get in the way of the narrative – stories of the past are frequently interrupted by her musings. However, as you come to know Person, these reflections become illuminating insights instead of intrusive interruptions.



Cea Sunrise Person

Person also uses this memoir to pull back the curtain on the process of writing and publishing a book. She details the many rejections, the pain of unfulfilled hopes, and the

(continued on page 34)

THERE YOU ARE

Colin James Sanders

The whole occupation of poet, if it does exist as an identity in the current society, is one that has to do with a spiritual, cultural practice of words, and can't be 'bought.'

~ Joanne Kyger

This marvellous and exacting collection is required reading for persons interested in the history of the San Francisco Renaissance and the poets who emerged within that community. Specifically, this collection situates Joanne Kyger (1934-1917) as the principle female poet within a community and poetry scene dominated by men. This evocative and enchanting posthumous collection: *There You Are: Interviews, Journals, and Ephemera* (2017) is thoughtfully edited by Cedar Sigo, a poet of the Suquamish Nations, Washington, who studied with Kyger at Naropa University and living now in San Francisco. Resulting from Sigo's superb editorial efforts, this collection offers a revealing addition towards comprehending the wide range of influences and enchantments informing Kyger's practice as a poet. Sigo's Introduction provides a valuable, informative, biographical graph of Kyger's life, illustrated with a few personal anecdotes.

This rich collection contains letters to Kyger from dear friends, including Philip Whalen, Lew Welch and Charles Olson; brief recollections by Kyger of Robert Creeley, Jack Kerouac and of Gregory Corso; photographs; India journal entries; a facsimile of a poem to Kyger by Ann Waldman and one by Michael McClure, in addition to other ephemera, as noted in the subtitle. Importantly, the several interviews collected in this volume capture Kyger at different moments along the path of her lifetime, providing, overall, an account of an existence lived intentionally, simply, thoughtfully and non-materialistically; an existence especially attuned to local ecology, and attention to, and deep appreciation for, a poetic articulation of the daily commonplace.

In conversation with Paul Watsky in 2013, Kyger recounts her mother was Irish and Scottish, one of eleven children, born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; her mother's family moved in 1914 to Long Beach, California. Kyger, born in Vallejo, California, in 1934, attended high school in Santa Barbara, and the University of California, Santa Barbara, where she studied with some "excellent teachers" including Canadian literary critic "Hugh Kenner, who taught Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, and Paul Wienpahl, who taught Wittgenstein and Heidegger." Of Wienpahl, Kyger observed, "He showed us how Heidegger's 'nothing' was the bridge into D.T. Suzuki's Buddhist nothingness", perhaps providing inspiration towards Kyger's own decades' long interest in Buddhism, an integral thread woven throughout the kinship of her friendships and practices.

Moving to San Francisco in 1957, Kyger became part of a community of poets, artists, and musicians associated with the San Francisco Renaissance, at the time a community evolving around the poets Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer and Robin Blaser.

Moving in 1960 to Japan, "...because I was really interested in studying Buddhism", she married Gary Snyder (they divorced in 1965). Together, they travelled through Japan and India, where, along with Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky, they met the young Dalai Lama, not yet thirty. Sections of Kyger's journals from her time in India, appear in *There You Are*.

Though immersed in a predominantly male poetic milieu, Kyger evolved her own



***There You Are:
Interviews, Journals,
and Ephemera***
Joanne Kyger
Edited by Cedar Sigo
Wave Books, 2017



Joanne Kyger in 1971

unique voice, becoming a respected and integral member of the San Francisco Renaissance, publishing her first book of poetry in 1965, *The Tapestry and the Web*. Eschewing ambition, competitiveness, and fame Kyger, her friend, poet Robert Creeley observed, "...has had no interest in the usual market place of this art [poetry], the anthologies, appointments, etc. Yet this fact has nothing to do with a Puritan austerity of purpose. Rather, she lives so explicitly where she is and with what she has as daily factor, that some projection of it all into the vacant generality of usual ambitions has never been her interest." Introducing Kyger at a poetry reading in Buffalo, April 2, 1982, Creeley referred to her as "the First Lady of Poetry", distinguishing her writing from others' proposing, "There is no poet with more whimsically tough a mind, no one who moves faster in a seeming offhand attention and purpose."

Kyger left San Francisco in 1969 to live in the still unincorporated town of Bolinas, north of San Francisco. In conversation with Trevor Carolan, Kyger reflected, "I don't think it was until I moved to Bolinas in 1969 that I really entered into a close relationship with the land around me in my writing." Bolinas would become a central focus within the constellation and synergy of Kyger's poetry. "Perhaps compulsively I always date all my writing, even to the hour sometimes. I feel writing is an occurrence, a happening, an intersection of the writer and time and place. The writing happens in the natural world of seasons, weather, tides. Where is the sun, where is the moon? This 'real' world is there in concert with the writer's words, moods, muse."

In a conversation with Chris McCreary, Kyger said, "I've always lived a West Coast, more or less rural, life. In this world, the emergence of a regional history has given us a language of geographical and environmental awareness." Though Kyger lived within the biosphere and community of Bolinas, she was not reclusive; in interviews collected here, Kyger's thought weaves between poetics and politics. For years, Kyger attended to local developments as editor for the *Bolinas Hearsay News*, and reproduced here are facsimiles of the front page of three editions, one illustrated by Philip Whalen, one by Kyger's longtime Bolinas friend, artist Arthur Okamura, and one by her partner, Donald Guravich. According to Kyger, the newspaper would publish "...announcements concerning roads, water usage, the Fire Department, the school, etc., and agendas for meetings for all pertinent organizations..."; it also published the minutes of meetings, and Kyger observed how "It makes the 'government' here much more transparent. The paper works as a community bulletin in which everyone is a 'reporter' - the only requirement being that you sign your name."

Beginning around 1972, Kyger also lived in parts of Mexico for varying periods of time; her first Mexican trip was to San Cristobal de las Casas, where "The ancestral spirits of the Mayan people have never left..." Interestingly, given the current divisive debate regarding NAFTA, Kyger observed, "There is no denying there is striking poverty in Mexico and NAFTA seems to add to it. Simply put, NAFTA has had horrible consequences for a vast majority of Mexicans - the working poor, small farmers, etc...Safety, environmental and wage laws have been eroded." In Mexico, Kyger witnessed how "Globalization is a real threat to the support of 'endangered cultures'" and presciently reflected, "I think the very form of our government with 'a' president at the top is archaic, patriarchal, dangerous."

Kyger published more than thirty books of poetry and prose; this posthumous collection selected by Sigo reveals the mind and presence within this body of writing that is consistently thoughtful, erudite and illuminating. Request that your local library purchase the book, and engage with the elegant poetic articulation of the ineffable, mysterious, and commonplace which she bequeathed us.

Colin James Sanders PhD reviews frequently for PRRB. Colin writes from B.C.'s Sunshine Coast.

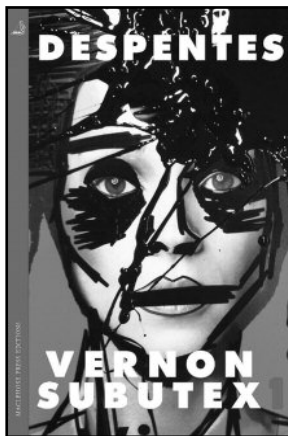


Joanne Kyger

VIRGINIE DESPENTES' NFT GUIDE OF PARIS: VERNON SUBUTEX

Anna Aublet

My last *Letter from Paris* was an attempt at uncovering the buried fragments of poetry concealed deep within the Parisian underground. It is therefore only logical that this letter should focus on a writer whose trilogy follows a character's descent down the entrails of Parisian life. French writer Virginie Despentes published last May the last volume of her *Vernon Subutex* trilogy, the first book of which has recently been published in English, and she won three prestigious literary prizes including the Anais Nin Prize. The novel follows the wanderings of a former record shop owner turned hobo through the winding streets of Paris. The rebellious tone and vivid realism of Despentes' writings earned her nicknames such as the "rock n' roll Zola" or the "new Balzac". One of the best ways to get a sense of Despentes' bold urban prose is to take a walk down the map of Paris she unfolds before us:



Vernon Subutex
Virginie Despentes
MacLehose Press, 2017

**Goncourt Subway Station –
Église St Maur – revolver record shop –**

The fictional record shop formerly owned by Vernon Subutex is rooted between the 10th and 11th districts where you may still find a few shops which survived the record crisis at the turn of the new millennial (Ground Zero, Music Please Record Shop, International Records). Its name, "revolver", could not be more appropriate. Not only does it echo Despentes' call for social *revolution*, nor is it only a reference to the Beatles' album (another way to go about the books could be through the innumerable musical allusions): it is the place around which everything *revolves* or rather, *revolved* before the store had to close, leaving its owner unemployed. The shop, "Revolver", from the Latin *revolver* used to bring people together, it was the centre of a small community and its mention often brings the characters back to an idealized, simpler time. It is also the place where one of the main characters (whose death is central to the story), singer Alex Beach, learned about rock n' roll. After being evicted, Vernon Subutex will find himself holding out his hand and begging for the first time right next to where it all began, at Goncourt subway station near St Maur church. "He had headed up towards PyrénéesMétro station only to stop at Goncourt dead on his feet. [...] Then he had held out his hand. It had not been premeditated. He had simply made the gesture." (*Vernon Subutex*, Vol. I)

**Parc des Buttes Chaumont –
Butte Bergeyre – Vernon's bench – Rosa Bonheur**

Vernon Subutex goes down the social ladder and up the Parisian hills. He finds shelter right on the edge of the Parc des Buttes Chaumont in the 19th district where the protagonists will end up meeting throughout the books. Overlooking Paris, Vernon learns to contemplate the cityscape, a splendid view of the Sacré Coeur opening before him. The park and its bar The Rosa Bonheur (which opened in 2007) slowly become the new revolver, a place of social interactions where all the layers of the population convene, without distinction. It becomes the central place where all the characters looking for Vernon will converge, the struggling movie director, the loaded trader, the dog-loving panhandler, the student, the tattoo artist, the former porn star and her transgender friend. The park is a free space where Vernon can reinvent himself into the spiritual leader of the gang.

**Le Marais
Rue Vieille du Temple**

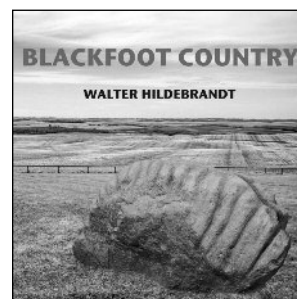
As two of her protagonists are sitting at a café in Le Marais, smoking outside in spite of the Parisian drizzle while sipping a muscat d'Alsace, Despentes delivers her love letter to Paris: "she loves Paris anyway, from Porte de La Chapelle to Montparnasse. She

likes the superimposition of contradictory layers, the intersections and brutal variations. [...] All the articulations are possible and she is a piece of the mosaic." (*Vernon Subutex*, Vol. II). Like the park, Paris becomes on a macro-scale, a place of intersection which the writer strives to depict. The term "mosaic" used in the sentence obliquely refers to the construction of the novel itself, a portrait gallery, each piece slowly revealing the canvas of Despentes' Parisian society. Like Odysseus, no matter how far Vernon goes, he always comes back to Paris. The novel revolves around the city in spite of its postlapsarian atmosphere after the Bataclan and Charlie Hebdo attacks. From the cheap fast-food joint to the upscale delicatessen at Lafayette Gourmet, the novel gracefully brings together the high hillsides of Montmartre and the lower guts of the Métro station.

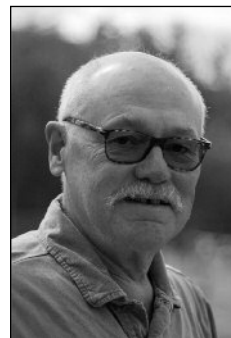


Virginie Despentes

Anna Aublet is PRRB's Contributing Editor, Paris.



ISBN 978-1-77171-213-2
Poetry
184 pages
8 x 8
\$33.95



Available now
from Ekstasis Editions

Blackfoot Country
new poetry by
Walter Hildebrandt

As told to him by Narcisse Blood the story of Blackfoot Country is grounded in place or geography and then rises up in Walter Hildebrandt's docu-poem to allow us to see the intricate and elaborate life of the Blackfoot people who were on the Great Plains, as Narcisse Blood tells, long before the pyramids of Egypt. The North American Great Plains were not empty spaces waiting to be occupied by Europeans but were a place where the Blackfoot people established a rich and enduring way of life. The stories, as Narcisse Blood said, "arise from the land" and we have much to learn from this history ranging from the buffalo hunt, fur trade, acquisition of the horse and the gun, epidemics, the buffalo robe trade, treaties and reserve life.

Historian and poet Walter Hildebrandt was born in Brooks, Alberta and now lives in Edmonton. A previous volume of poetry, *Where the Land Gets Broken*, received the Stephan G. Stephanson for best poetry book in Alberta in 2005. This is his tenth book of poetry.

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TRAMPING THE BULRUSHES

Patrick James Dunagan

“Don’t pee on my leg and tell me it’s raining.” In other words, don’t bullshit me. A colorful bit of poetic witticism I recently overheard down at the bar the other afternoon during a stop-in while doing my laundry next door. And quite apropos of the poet whose book I had in hand, John “Jack” Clarke’s *Tramping the Bulrushes*. Highlighting archival material, the collection presents unvarnished firsthand documentation of a lifetime’s dedication to poetry by a poet who bucked “the System” in his own distinctive manner.

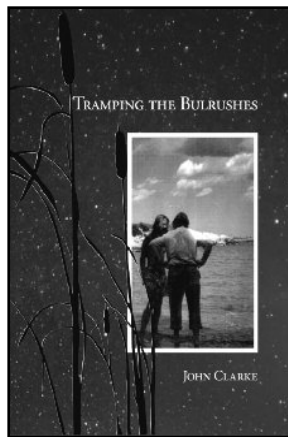
Any sort of critical interest in Clarke’s work has yet to emerge to any measurable degree. He toiled in near obscurity under the cover of a professorship in the English department at SUNY Buffalo until his death in 1993. All the while pursuing his work within a prophetic mythopoetic tradition drawn from off the poetic lineages of William Blake and Charles Olson. Once Olson hit Buffalo in the mid-1960s a fascinating energetic spasm of poetry activity started to occur (various publications, readings, and visiting poets, university-affiliated and otherwise). Clarke was soon smack dab in the midst of it and that’s right where he remained, always on his own terms, even as the vast majority of the outside poetry world paid little if any interest in his activities. Ironically enough this was as the Buffalo Poetics program grew in recognition with a faculty of poets including Susan Howe, Charles Bernstein, and Robert Creeley.

Tramping the Bulrushes offers an expansive sampling of Clarke’s voluminous outpouring of work. Editor Michael Boughn, a poet himself and former student of Clarke’s, dived into the poet’s archives in Buffalo churning out a grand assemblage of material in the many formats Clarke avidly engaged with equal commitment and aplomb. A few items have previously appeared in a clutch of stable-bound chapbooks and/or fugitive small press magazines—such as Clarke’s own *Intent*, *Letter of Talk*, *Think*, & *Document* produced and mailed out from his home address—yet the vast majority of the work gathered together here never saw publication. Thus making it the long-awaited companion volume to Clarke’s set of challengingly dense yet brilliant lectures, the colossally ambitious: *From Feathers to Iron: A Concourse in World Poetics* (1987).

There are several poems and poem-series—a form Clarke came to favor working in, frustratingly leaving his projected epic ten book sonnet-series *In The Analogy* (1997) unfinished at the time of his death—along with lectures, short essays, and correspondence. All of which, at points, boil over into each other. Clarke’s letters oftener than not bleed into becoming poetry and/or statements of his poetics; just as the opening piece “Lots of Doom” first reads as a “lecture” yet in reality turns out to have been a poetry reading. This is a result of, as Clarke was well aware, it being “a matter of stamina of being able to stay with it, with the things, of the presence to be made permanent by articulation.” (“Fire Delighting in Its Form”) Each occasion triggered into action expression of the visionary poetic knowledge in back of Clarke’s work. Every opportunity to be heard became an all or nothing situation requiring titanic energy on his part.

There are also a set of protective well-tempered diatribes in reaction against an anti-Olson sentiment sparked by Tom Clark’s 1991 biography *Charles Olson: Allegory of a poet’s Life* which invited critiques of the poet on personal grounds as well as antipathetic views towards his work in general. Clarke’s admonitions on Olson’s behalf are staunch in their unfailing allegiance to adhering to accuracy towards the work itself. His interest is with the larger movements of ideas Olson held to and the creative space he opened and left behind for future adherents to continue working in. “Olson was one of the last to dare intervention upon our time. He left a huge monkey wrench in the works and, I think, that’s what is so resented by the Hierarchy.” (“Tramping the Bulrushes”)

To be clear, Clarke was no mere Olson imitator. Boughn describes the nature of the Olson-Clarke relationship: “They travelled in the company of each other’s thinking. Clarke found a boundless potential there, a thinking that resonated with Blake’s thinking, opening into otherwise occulted complexities of our strange condition.”



Tramping the Bulrushes
John Clarke
Preface by Michael Boughn
Introduction by Lisa Jarnot
Afterword by Daniel Zimmerman
Dispatches Editions / Spuyten Duyvil, 2017

(“Preface”) And to be sure “Clarke moved, as Al Cook stated, as far beyond Olson as Olson moved beyond Pound.” In addition, poet Lisa Jarnot’s Introduction recalls her time as an undergraduate student in “tweedy Dr. Clarke’s” class “Approaches to Literature: Mythology (Greeks and Romans)” and how she “stopped doodling” on “day one” when he declared “Mythology is about what happened before the System took over”. Clarke’s “subversive maneuvers” in classroom discussion kept her interested while his “light touch” when it came to avoiding pushing his own poetic allegiances to Olson and others was in hindsight quite admirable. The only agenda in back of Clarke’s work is full immersion in furthering the possibilities of the work itself. There is no pandering to obligations from outside of that framework.

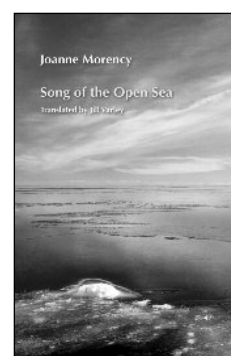
In today’s poetry world it feels more and more as if MFA programs are corralling poets into AWP-sanctioned territories. The poets writing and being recognized for their work are indeed a broader group than ever. In terms of skin color and gender identification it’s certainly a far more diverse crowd of individuals gathering together at poetry events across the country than at any previous time. Yet that’s also reflected at the broader cultural level in the U.S. as well. Problems remain at heart with the role of underlying characteristics within the larger institutional forces at play, which remain unthreatened. Poets like Clarke always keep a steady eye on this other level, where the levers of the powers-that-be truly operate. Poetry’s ongoing business should remain one of wariness over any slacking off in that regard. In other words, “Don’t pee on my leg and tell me it’s raining.”



John Clarke

Patrick James Dunagan lives in San Francisco and works at Gleeson Library for the University of San Francisco. His recent books include *from Book of Kings* (Bird and Beckett Books) and *The Duncan Era: One Reader’s Cosmology* (Spuyten Duyvil).

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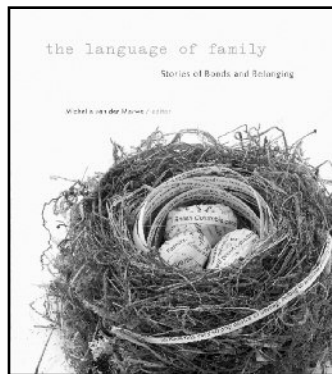
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TALES AND PHOTOS OF BC FAMILIES

Eric Spalding

The Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria commissioned *The Language of Family: Stories of Bonds and Belonging* for Canada's 150th anniversary. The editor, Michelle van der Merwe, asked several BC-based writers to reflect upon families. The results are diverse. Famed author Patrick Lane contributes a poem. Joy Kogawa offers a brief excerpt from her memoirs. Curators at the Royal BC Museum share their perspectives. Other contributors write about BC families of Indigenous, French, Norwegian, African, Punjabi and Chinese descent.

I can picture a visitor to the Royal BC Museum browsing through the gift shop and purchasing this attractive book as a memento or present. There are photographs on almost every page, representing various BC families from the 19th century on. Most are black and white, but some are in colour. A few, I should note, are quite small and I was squinting to make out details within them. Nevertheless, I can imagine the buyer of this book going through them as I used to do with *National Geographic*: I would admire the photos but I would seldom read the articles. Leafing through *The Language of Family*, the purchaser will see dozens of old photos of BC families standing in front of their homes or posing stiltedly in photographers' studios. There are many unsmiling faces, reinforcing my impression from reading the essays that the first settlers in BC led hardscrabble lives. Lt.-Governor Judith Guichon says so much in her history of her cattle-ranching ancestors, who did their best in an isolated and unforgiving environment.



The Language of Family: Stories of Bonds and Belonging
Ed. Michelle van der Merwe
Royal British Columbia Museum, 2017

Guichon's account of her heritage shows that there is value in going beyond the photos. In this regard, museum curator Lorne F. Hammond emphasizes that the museum object, which in my view includes the photo, cannot stand alone: "As I tell students, only 50 per cent of the value of our collection is in the object. The other half is the human stories attached to it. The human story is as important to record as your object storage location. Without both halves, the object is lost." Through its various essays, *The Language of Family* tells many human stories.

As with any compilation, different readers will prefer different essays. Moreover, like myself, they probably will not go through the book from A to Z. I read all of the essays, but I did so out of order, starting with the ones that most piqued my curiosity. In the end, the articles that I found most rewarding were the ones by Barbara Findlay, Lynn Greenhough, and Tzu-I Chung.

Barbara Findlay was 67 at the time of writing "Queer as Family." In her essay, she explains how hard it was early on for her and her female partner to be accepted by those around them. Indeed, Findlay's family was reluctant to recognize the couple, and she refrained from telling her employer about her relationship. Canadian law moreover offered no support. Findlay provides many examples of the challenges that she and her

(continued on page 38)



Editor Michelle van der Merwe

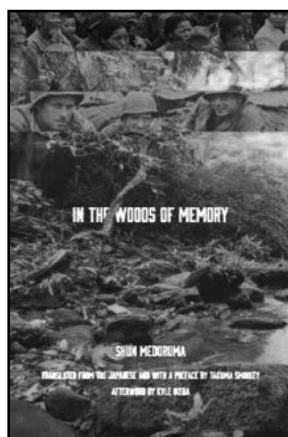
IN THE WOODS OF MEMORY

Trevor Carolan

Post-WW II rage and guilt is something that hasn't faded easily around the blue Pacific. As hot-button items go, the Rape of Nanking, the wartime sex slavery of Korea's Comfort Women, and the various outrage crimes committed in Okinawa remain as volatile as ever. Shun Medoruma's difficult novel reminds us why.

With their own history, customs and language, Okinawans have long had their own colonial issues with Japan. The bloody Battle of Okinawa that took place near the end of WW II did nothing to improve relations, and the U.S. Occupation that followed with its subsequent (and still ongoing) strategic U.S. military presence there has been a heart-scald. Medoruma takes one beastly incident, a rape by U.S. soldiers of an island girl, and a subsequent revenge attack by a youth in love with her, and frames an investigative look at the devastating aftermath of the war in the Pacific. There are no good memories stirred up, and with current sabre-rattling growing steadily in the South China Sea, it's a timely moment for this work to appear in English translation.

Originally published in serial format between 2004 and 2007, the novel opens with scenes of the terror that islanders felt as victorious U.S. forces mop up operations and begin their Occupation. There's new building taking place, the disinfection of villagers to improve their health, and G.I.s hand out chocolate to the kiddies and food to their parents. "[They've] started to grovel", one character laments as a rough, unhappy equilibrium looks to be shaping up. Then Sayoko, a local girl, is seized while



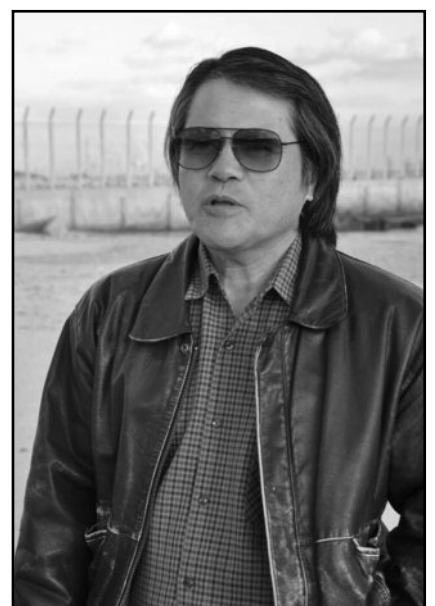
In the Woods of Memory
Shun Medoruma
Translated by Takuma Sminkey
Stone Bridge Press, 2017

shell-fishing with her friends and savagely raped by U.S. soldiers. The incident has historic precedents and may not sound alien to readers. Similar crimes have occurred since, the worst a gang rape of an elementary schoolgirl in 1995, again by U.S. soldiers. Back in 1945, while the elders impotently discuss remedies, Seiji, the boy in love with Sayoko takes direct action in an underwater attack on an American soldier with a fishing harpoon. The soldier is not killed, but the consequences of the attack play out over decades.

Medoruma's unorthodox treatment of Sayoko's and Seiji's story shapes a kind of cubist work. It's a book that unfolds from altered angles as an interwoven series of accounts from different characters about precisely what and how things happened, as well as their long-term impacts. Villagers, friends, the appointed political Ward Chief, distant relations, curious onlookers, and an American ex-military man of Okinawan background with fluency in both Japanese and the Okinawan language—in linked chapters each expresses another version of the fuller truth.

A slow-moving novel, *In The Woods of Memory* snakes painfully through accumulated layers of Japanese and Okinawan forgetting and uncomfortable memory

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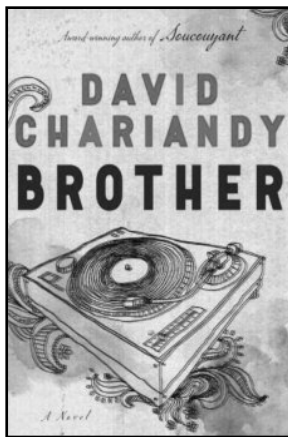
Shun Medoruma

BROTHER

Rajnish Dhawan

A young, black/brown boy dies in a police shootout. The police follow protocol. He ends up as yet another statistical entry in the crime bureau. A few seconds before he is shot, he asks the policeman a question. The question remains unanswered. His voice echoes through the respective lives of his brother and his mother and it comes alive through the pages of David Chariandy's novel *Brother*.

Brother is David Chariandy's second novel. In his debut work *Soucouyant*, a young man returns home to take care of his mother who is suffering from dementia. In *Brother*, a young man stays home to take care of his mother who is suffering from grief. The novel is set in "The Park" in "Scar-bro" a suburban ghetto where Michael lives with his mother and his brother Francis. It's a neighbourhood that over the years has "mushroomed up and yellowed, browned and blackened into life." Mrs. Chandrashekhar, Mr. Chow, Pilar Fernandez and other yellow, brown and black residents of the neighbourhood give energy to this neighbourhood. Among the two



Brother
David Chariandy
Penguin
180 pages, 2017

brothers, Francis imbibes this energy while his younger brother Michael tries to siphon off some of it to find a place for himself in The Park. In the absence of his father, whose presence in the household is limited to an old, out-of-focus photograph shelved secretly in their mother's bedroom, Francis searches for a sense of belonging among the sign-posts in the neighbourhood—its bus shelters, the 7/11 store, the curb-sides, and most vibrant of all—Desirea's, a struggling hair-salon and hangout for local teens. Michael shadows him but he is unsure of himself, in a defensive sort of a way. Francis too, is unsure but he has decided to take the bull by its horns. He confronts the neighbourhood thugs, draws blood and when the police raid Desirea's, he is not afraid to ask the police, "What have we done?" He doesn't get an answer, but he does get a bullet in his body.



David Chariandy

Chariandy's prose is simple, direct, poetic. He paints the picture of "The Park" with deft strokes of brilliance:

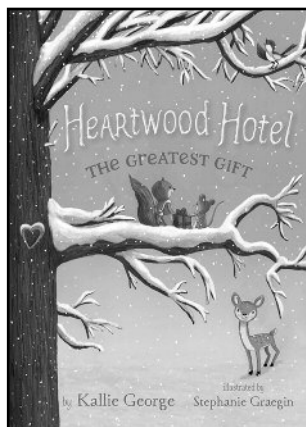
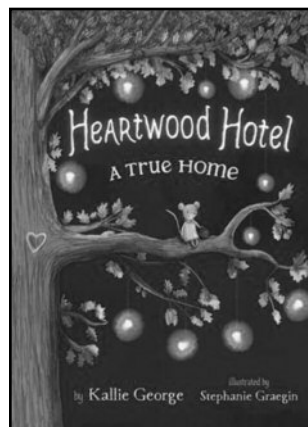
They spoke different languages, they ate different foods, but they were all from one colony or the other, so they had shared vocabulary for describing feral children like us. We were "ragamuffins." We were "hooligans" up to no good "gallivanting." We were what a neighbour, more poet than security guard, described as "oiled creatures of mongoose cunning," raiding

(continued on page 31)

Children's Books

THE ARRIVAL OF A WONDERFUL NEW SERIES FOR CHILDREN

Chelsea Pastorchik



The Heartwood Hotel: A True Home, and The Greatest Gift
Kallie George
illustrated by Stephanie Graegin
Harper-Collins, 2017

Upon the birth of my daughter, I was gifted these two books. My husband and I were instantly enchanted by the beautiful artwork scattered across the pages, and decided that, although these small chapter books were clearly targeted at newly independent readers, we would start reading them to our newborn.

These stories chronicle the lives of the staff and guests at the Heartwood Hotel, a hotel for forest animals. Each book corresponds to one season at the hotel – so far, fall and winter have been covered, with a book about spring set to be released in February. The series reminds me of a junior version of Brian Jacques' *Redwall* series because of its animal characters, songs and feasts.

I am sure my daughter will grow up loving these books, and I will love that she loves them. As a parent, I appreciate that both stories feature Mona the mouse, one of the smallest characters, using the power of ideas to tackle challenges that others believe to be insurmountable. The stories are also simply but beautifully written, and portray themes of bravery, honesty, friendship, and gratitude. The teacher in me is thrilled by the accurate depictions of different forest species – I can imagine reading this book with a class during an ecology unit and exploring the different habitats, adaptations and diets

of the characters, and the interactions between them.

Mostly though, I love this book because of how I imagine my daughter experiencing it. First, she will be captivated by her father voicing the myriad characters in these stories: soft-spoken Mona the mouse, an unctuous lizard, a wise and rumbling badger, a sleep-befuddled bear, southern-drawling wolves, a shrill rabbit... each character is distinct from the next, and their personalities make it easy to imagine voices for them. Later, she will study the pictures sprinkled on these pages and imagine the story for herself, creating adventures for the animals she sees on the pages. Eventually, she will read these books on her own, picture the halls of the Heartwood Hotel and the paths of Fernwood Forest. She will hold her breath as Mona braves danger for the sake of her friends. And she will ask that I learn how to bake the many delicious treats prepared by the hotel's porcupine cook, Ms. Prickles.

As we read this book to our four month old daughter before bed each night, I imagine how these books will look in ten years, with dust jackets missing, baby teeth marks on the corner of one cover, some of the black and white pictures colored in (almost completely in the lines!), berry stains on a page or two, and wildflowers pressed between the pages. These are books that will never sit gathering dust on the shelves of our home.



Kallie George



Stephanie Graegin

Chelsea Pastorchik is a frequent contributor to the PRRB.

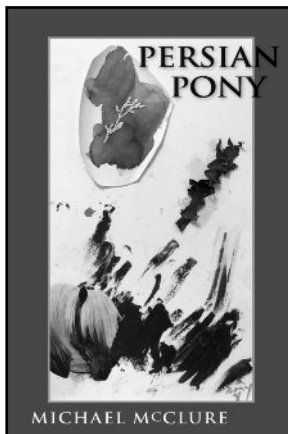
REORGANIZING YOUR CONSCIOUSNESS: MCCLURE'S VISIONARY JOURNEY

Jesse Boyes

Reading Michael McClure's poetry is a visionary journey. It's also an ecstatic dance. In the preface to *Persian Pony* he quotes the romantic philosopher Friedrich Schlegel: "All art should become science and all science art; poetry and philosophy should be made one". McClure writes that these poems are conceived in "PROJECTIVE VERSE". His explanation of this form sounds to me like the effortless intelligence that beautifully expresses inspired thoughts arising from an embodied cognition. He says that "Poetry is a muscular principle." Is this true? It must be; his poems are alive. They are unmistakably charged with a lifetime of fleshy wisdom, not overly cerebral, and when read aloud feel like an in-person interaction with the poet himself.

Some folks have said that Michael McClure was a mentor to the phenomenal poet/lyricist/vocalist of *The Doors*, Jim Morrison. They were friends, and the corporeal style they both embody does suggest influence. *Persian Pony* is a linguistic carnival of ecological mythology, recollecting entheogenic mysteries and revelations. Specific species are named in relation to sporadic philosophical musings in the same poem in which we read of "...a / Mobius strip / of / stunned clowns". It's silly yet far from frivolous; rather, existential. Seriously playful.

In October of 2017, McClure read from his new book at Simon Fraser University's Harbour Centre in Vancouver, British Columbia. Eardrums resounding, I was enchanted by the resonant, still muscular voice carried by a man who was present and involved way back in the 'Beat Generation.' If anyone in the room was blinking, it would have been audible between words while he read his famous *Peyote Poem*. We were frozen



Persian Pony
Michael McClure
Ekstasis Editions, 2017

solid. The molecular biologist Francis Crick, a discoverer of the double helix form of DNA, quoted this poem in one of his scientific works. The importance of poetry was demonstrated to me directly and resolutely at this reading. This is to say that McClure seems to know that by speaking from the heart he is effectively reorganizing our consciousness, and the world.

The final poem of the fifty-eight contained in *Persian Pony* is called *Boulder Hill* and is a new favourite. An excerpt from midway through it reads: "...as these moths flutter / the nerves that reach from our eyes / to our brains and our shoulders and fingers / AND / NOW / out of nowhere / we've stepped into / YOUR INTERIOR / as it overlaps / and pours like a stream / in- / to / mine..."

(113). Not only can his poetry become part of you, but it fastens you to it so that you are not apart from it. I don't see how one could hear these poems and return to the world the same person. This is a book for people who did not know they appreciated poetry. It's a book for fellow poets. It's a book for biologists, psychologists, and philosophers; a book that I believe will speak to everyone who has any kind of love of life.

Ethnobotanist Jesse Boyes writes from B.C.'s Fraser Valley



Michael McClure

DRAWING THE SHADE

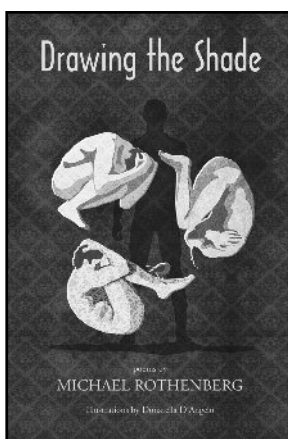
Richard Stevenson

The title of this book works on several levels, and the book draws on several traditions, both Modernist and Post-Modernist. On the one hand, it's a straightforward series of five poetic journal entries, mixing realistic demotic prose with lyric observations in mellifluous transcendent verse. On the other hand, it frequently shifts from post-modern open form to modernist lyric-narrative. It's a long poem/ journal, deploying both imagist and projectivist verse strategies, and even breaks into one-act play dialogue and expressionist sound poetry word play.

Fun is perhaps the best operant description – or playful – as it becomes clear the poet has his demons to ward off as well as trying times and events to document.

The first thing the title made me think of was a traditional mourning period after a funeral. Drawing the drapes. Shutting off computer, radio, TV, stereo, and turning one's back on material things, going into a period of reflection, deep meditation in honor of one's dead relation or friend.

Later, we learn from the proceedings, that the poet's grandmother is dying and the Jewish practice of *Shiva* is advised, that his poet/mentor, Joanne Kyger, is also looking death in the face and the



Drawing the Shade
Michael Rothenberg
Illustrations by
Donatella D'Angelo,
Dos Madres Press Inc.
154 pp, \$19.00 US

author himself is at a low ebb dealing with her literary affairs and going through writer's block and depression of his own. The elegiac tone is broken up with observations of the quotidian in plain language. In imagistic description of landscape and daily encounters with fresh faces.

Another possible meaning is the idea of drawing out the shades. Making the demons visible. Confronting one's invented self with re-invention and travel. Staring down the shades of death. The poet, born in Miami Beach in 1951, moves to the San Francisco Bay area, travels to Cuba, and returns to his early life in Lake Jackson in Tallahassee, Florida. His mentors say travel. Initially, to awaken his senses to new experience, to work on the input channels. The poet too is no longer middle-aged, after all, and feels a need to make peace the domestic demands of the country of everyday, while maintaining his devotion to his art, to somehow show how that can be



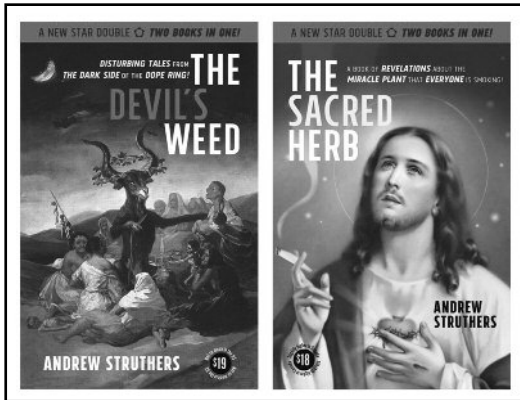
Michael Rothenberg (Photo by Terri Carrion)

(continued on page 35)

THE SACRED HERB / THE DEVIL'S WEED

Paulo Phelonius

We live in a golden age for pot. Nowhere is this true more than in Vancouver, British Columbia's largest city. "B.C. Bud" has been revered in the weed-world for a long time now. I remember crossing the Atlantic, sidling up to my first coffee shop in Amsterdam and being offered their "best stuff, straight from B.C." In a pothead province like this one, there is nowhere easier to get some of the green than Vancouver. In fact, there may never have been a time and place as free and easy as this for marijuana-lovers. Dispensaries outnumber craft breweries, organic grocery stores and maybe even sushi restaurants. They're ubiquitous, some blocks boasting two or three outlets. They aren't hiding either: colourful signs and sweet, acrid smoke mark pot-hawkers in every neighbourhood in the city. It's so good for stoners already, that when Canada legalizes this year in July the federal legal herb can only become less convenient, more taxed and regulated, and less of a utopian vision. Government intervention rarely makes a chill thing chiller, eh? Flip-side, if you're still boarded up in your house, terrified about reefer madness, then Andrew Struthers new book, *The Sacred Herb/ The Devil's Weed* is for you.

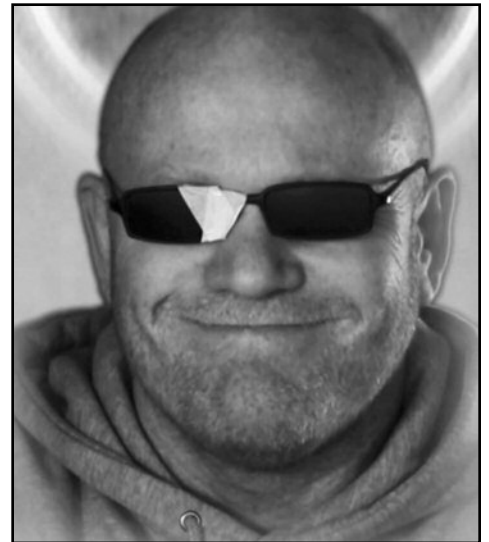


The Sacred Herb/ The Devil's Weed
Andrew Struthers
New Star Books, 2017

As the name suggests, this is not one, but two books. One side of the edition is *The Sacred Herb*, flip it and you're reading *The Devil's Herb*. You can read it from either side, giving you a different approach to understand this crucial point in the toker timeline. The quirkiness of Struthers' book doesn't end there, either. This is a fun read. The spine looks like its grafted on from a manga volume, the text is filled with nutty pothead humour and cartoons that have a direct link to the kind of drawing I once saw

in metaphysical, self-help, and vegan cookbooks in my hippie aunt's library during my childhood. Of course, more than a few people are trying to capitalize on this moment. What makes this book so vital is that it not only takes the subject up with the humorous approach that it deserves, but that Struthers blends in plenty of useful content with a unique format that really delivers.

First, *The Sacred Herb*. Here, Struthers takes on myths and pertinent questions about good ganja. While this is a more formulaic side of the book in Q & A format, its fresh conversational language and informal layout keep things interesting in addressing one key question per chapter. The chapters bleed into each other and even their titles seem playful and consistent with the tone (ie. "Why Does Music taste Better When I'm Gooned" or "What was That About Scythians?"). There's a lot of information here, from whether pot makes music better and memory worse, to addiction, conspiracies, and which strains are better for you. Struthers is a warehouse of information and does his research to fill the gaps.



Andrew Struthers

Where *Herb* does its best to deploy the facts to those who may have an understandably shortened attention span (or, not), *The Devil's Weed* turns to experience. Here Struthers collects stories of 100 misadventures of his friend's dalliances with sweet Mary Jane. This section trips far from the structured questions of *Herb*. He introduces it with an "Epilog," which comes at us from the middle of a particularly intense bout of cake-based high in a hot tub in Clayoquot Sound. We are reminded

(continued on page 28)

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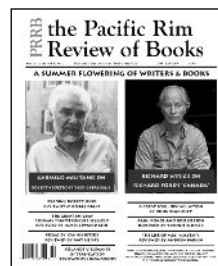
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DELIGHT AND DISMAY: LIFE IN A REFUGEE CLINIC

Rose Morrison

In *Your Heart is the Size of Your Fist* author Martina Scholtens writes about the decade she spent working three days a week as a physician at the Vancouver Refugee Clinic. In the telling she disguises actual patients' names, family situations and backgrounds and presents unidentifiable but representative patient characters.

Scholtens grew up in a conservative, religious Dutch-Canadian community in British Columbia's Fraser Valley. From an early age her continual thirst for learning suggested to her that traditionally-prescribed career choices would not be for her. She knew that she was a talented writer and that she loved to write, but after a year of arts courses at university she longed for the more objective answers that science could render. She switched faculties and went on to train as a medical doctor while retaining her interest in writing. Scholtens has published articles in print and online previously, and *Your Heart is the Size of Your Fist* is her first published book.

Two types of journey travel through the book. One is the journey of the Haddads and other refugee families who arrive at the refugee clinic fearful, deeply grieving and traumatized. The other is the author's own journey toward self-knowledge and equanimity as she assesses her professional, family and personal commitments and her reasons for writing medical narrative. She develops a growing awareness of some systemic problems that hamper refugees in Canada, and decides to make some career changes.

Scholtens' book is funny, sad, engaging, informative and horrifying. I felt both delight and dismay while reading it. While language is a challenge for many refugees, in an early meeting between Scholtens and the Haddads, a mispronunciation becomes an ice breaker. 'I try to kill you. ... Twice I try to kill you,' Yosef Haddad tells the doctor. He intended to say 'call' not kill; Scholtens, Yosef and Junah Haddad and their children Nadia and Layth laugh when the mistake is realized.

Lack of English is a big issue for most patients at the clinic; one woman spends a distraught week believing that her unborn baby has no arms. She brings Scholtens an ultrasound picture; 'Look,' says the translator, 'baby has no arms.' Scholtens is able to reassure the mother-to-be that baby is fine, and to point out tiny arms held close to the little body in the image. Cross-cultural misunderstandings occur frequently too. Scholtens, for example, compliments a patient from Myanmar on her shoes, and is immediately given them; and Junah, on her first solo bus trip, rides for several blocks past the clinic; she does not know how to signal the bus driver to stop. Yosef gets a large fine because he did not know that passengers must buy a ticket before boarding Skytrain.

This creative non-fiction book is also full of more serious situations. The whole Haddad family weeps over the mention of second son Sami. He and his journalist father Yosef were abducted in Mosul and beaten. Sami died of his injuries; he was nearly twelve. Fourteen-year-old Nadia has been having seizures since her brother's death, and she is very lonely. Sixteen-year-old Layth appears to be developmentally delayed; 'He cannot learn,' says Junah. Scholtens suspects a genetic condition; this thought is reinforced when she learns that Layth's parents are cousins; consanguineous marriage is apparently common in Iraq, the family's birth country. Some joy seeps into this story when Junah and Yosef are told that, in Canada, Layth can go to school.

There is no joy in reading that many refugees were tortured before coming to Canada. An African woman with unexplained scars all over her back later admits that she had been whipped; and Scholtens finds Yosef's account of his own torture so harrowing that she will not share it. His post traumatic shock syndrome is taking a toll, and he eventually consents to medication although he values his appointments with Scholtens more. The story that shocks me most, that is now seared into my mind, is that of Li who was tortured in his home country for practising Falun Gong, and who now sits trembling in a clinic chair. Scholtens describes his condition and measures every awful scar on his body; the lawyer who will represent him in his refugee claim



Your Heart is the Size of Your Fist: A Doctor Reflects on Ten Years at a Refugee Clinic
Martina Scholtens
Brindle & Glass, 2017



Dr. Martina Scholtens

needs this information. On his next visit, Li describes the other tortures he endured, the sexual ones that left no outside scars. He never sleeps at night, but sits in a chair facing his door, waiting for something to happen to him.

During the narrative's time-frame Scholtens, who is married and has three children, suffers a second-trimester miscarriage and later gives birth to her fourth child. She revisits the tenets by which she orders her busy life; her obligations as a medical doctor, spouse and mother, and expands her reasons for writing medical narrative to include advocacy. When the federal government cuts refugee health insurance she realizes that many of her patients' challenges are related to public health policy. Soon after the Haddads 'graduate' from the refugee clinic and become patients at a general practice medical clinic, Scholtens also leaves, deciding to focus her medical career on public health.

When you read this book you will laugh and cry; and be left to wonder how Scholtens puts so much profound information into such an easy, enjoyable read.

Rose Morrison is a regular contributor to PRRB. Her last article was "Victory Gardens for Bees: a DIY Guide to Saving the Bees", #22.

HERB/WEED (continued from page 27)

that pot (and the universe) eschew straight timelines. No beginnings or ends. Before you know what he means by that we are reading a chapter called "Summer," which is a long stream of consciousness account related the true tales. Summer turns to Fall, Winter and Spring before we hit the "Prolog" and finally bump into the acknowledgments at the back end of *The Sacred Herb*.

Ultimately, this is an essential book for seasoned stoners, curious beginners and yes, even those who still support the war on pot. Struthers does well to wade through all the hearsay and conjecture and to make his scientific findings accessible to every reader. This quirky mash-up works because Struthers is clearly a seasoned, career writer whose prose is tight, even when it is loose. It's rare, but he does sometimes drift into trying too hard to be casual with occasional over-reliance on the "as so-and-so would call it..." gambit. It's a minor fault, but one that grows enervating at times. Still, it helps that Struthers' anecdotes are usually worth the repetition. Funny, entertaining and educational, you'll find yourself digesting this (these?) books in an afternoon. Even if it takes a little longer than that, *The Sacred Herb/ The Devil's Weed*, is a must-read before July 2018 turns Canada into the great white northern hotbox.

Ethnobotanist Paulo Phelonius is a longtime contributor to PRRB.

TWO ROADS HOME

Joel Robertson Taylor

Set in 1993 amid third-wave environmentalism and notably at the time of the “war in the woods” protests at Clayoquot Sound, near Tofino on the west coast of Vancouver Island, *Two Roads Home* is an historical fiction novel that follows Pete Osborne and four activist friends through an unravelled plan to play with fire. Disenchanted by the seemingly little progress being made to protect old growth forests through anti-logging protests, they organize themselves to hit logging companies in new ways and make their concerns heard.

Daniel Griffin’s story establishes context: in their mid- 20s, Pete and friends are fed up with corporate obstinacy and a government that favours big business profits. They agreed to change tactics and move forward with sabotage. As the young ideologues push the envelope further, an act of resistance goes amiss. The group must hit the underground, lay low from the law.

With the accuracy of an imbedded observer, Griffin magnifies a landscape of emotional and social discord. The relational issues that the characters must grapple with are what underpins the story’s environmentalist context. Escaping the botched sabotage, Pete comes upon a small community of squatters whose way of living causes him to reevaluate his own. In a crucible of confusion and regret, the others grapple with their own feelings, longings, and a sense of obligation to continue the mission.

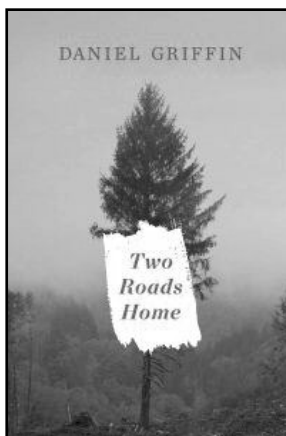
Two Roads Home ponders the line between activism and terrorism, and answers within the unfolding story. Within Griffin’s depiction of environmentalism, his characters lose themselves in the chaos of their actions, and negotiate with each other regarding how to recover the future they’d naively wished for. Their unquenched frustration resonates sharply with the eco-protests and police-standoffs seen in this past year in B.C. as Kinder Morgan prepares for its cross-province TransMountain pipeline expansion, as well as the recent approval of the controversial Site C dam project in the B.C. north. Further south on the map, The Dakota Access Pipeline protests at Standing Rock generated international headlines as a grassroots indigenous rights and environmental movement.

Two Roads Home comments on today’s environmental activism by asking many of the same questions as were asked during the original ‘Save Clayoquot’ protests. Griffin examines forms of resistance by scrutinizing the characters involved, for within the greater conversation of eco-activism, as with any social issue, there’s a deep, emotional human rooting of love, lust, and betrayal. Motivated by a variety of conflicting emotions, Peter’s group and their actions, though extreme, are compelled by familiar sentiments: frustration at being ignored, not heard, at nothing being done about an issue of officially unacknowledged urgency.

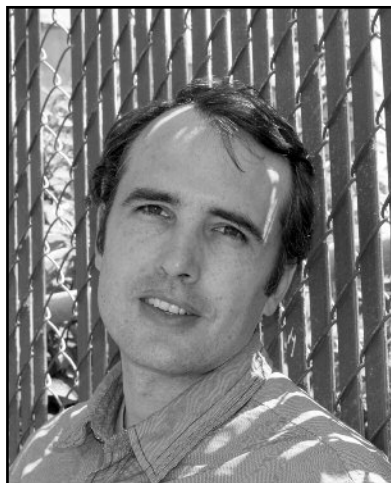
Griffin’s characters are explored through their subtle introduction of information with a passing comment or observation. As readers, we learn about the plot much the same way. With striking imagery drawn directly from the west coast, Griffin never forgets to emphasize the beauty of the land that his characters aim to protect. In the end, even if the story rejects violence, condemning it for its never-ending cycle of escalation, it calls us to an extreme degree of resolve, marked with cool dedication to a rightful cause.

Two Roads Home is a compelling thriller and a timely, fast paced eco-novel. With a lariat-like tension it draws the reader’s imagination into reimagining peaceful protests violently, and focuses on our human tendency to run towards or from conflict as we manoeuvre within intense personal and politically-engaged relationships.

Editor of *The Cascade*, Joel Robertson-Taylor is the recipient of the 2017 Canadian University Press student journalist of the year award.

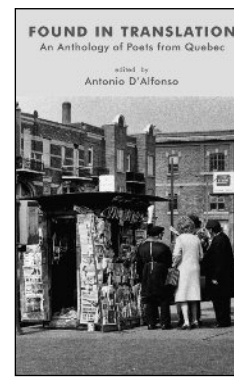
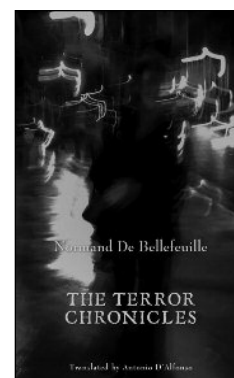


Two Roads Home
Daniel Griffin
Freehand, 2017



Daniel Griffin

Ekstasis Editions: a bridge between two solitudes



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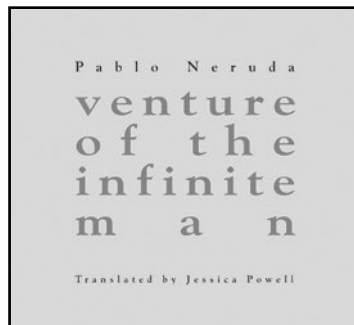
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VENTURE OF THE INFINITE MAN

Ajmer Rode

Venture of the infinite man, the book is one long poem divided into 15 cantos, is Pablo Neruda's unusual book. Its reception when first published in 1926 was also unusual. It inspired no serious review or critique. Readers who had fallen in love with Neruda's *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* published two years before found the new book a letdown. Nobody considered it worthy of translation to English until Jessica Powell in 2017 who has done a great service to the English readers. Mark Eisner wrote a befitting introduction providing a context and comments on significance of the poem. The introduction also helped me write this review. The book is published by The City Light Publishers (San Francisco, CA) in a nice square form. It includes the original Spanish and its English translation with a comment at the back cover: "Neruda's long-overlooked third book of poetry, critical in his poetic evolution, translated into English for the very first time."



venture of the infinite man
Pablo Neruda
Translated by Jessica Powell
Bilingual edition
City Lights Publishers
120 pages

Neruda does away with common textual and poetic conventions. No punctuation no capitalization no meter or rhyme. The unusual spacing between the cantos adds further to the mystery of the poem. And if absence of conventions doesn't confuse you the poem's semantic labyrinth will. Multiple possibilities will keep you searching for a clear sense a canto intends to convey. As well the poem defies usual categorization, and unlike Neruda's later works professes no ideology that could help understand meaning in a verse. The poem is almost obscure.

Yet it is not a purposeless exercise. Not a bunch of nocturnal wanderings strung together randomly by a 22-year youthful poet drunk on his recent fame brought by the *Twenty Love Poems*. Rather the poem resulted from Neruda's deliberate experimentation with innovative spurts abubble at that time and made him restless. He wanted to discover a style that would help him compose these spurts and help shape his new poetry to come. On the journey to this discovery he unwittingly followed the celebrated advice from Indian scripture, the Bhagavata Gita: "karmany evadhikaras te ma phalesu kadachana (do your Karma, worry not about the fruit)." Composing this poem Neruda did perform the karma of a true poet: expressed his innovative self as purely as possible and worried not if his new style would be popular, if it would bring him accolades like his previous works did.

Despite its obscurity *venture of the infinite man* could be a joy to read, though. One way to read, as I did, is to read a canto then continue reading line by line the empty space that follows before hitting the next canto. I felt the poet inserted the space to be read not skipped as we usually do. It was like walking step by step in the quiet of the mysterious. Albert Einstein said, "the most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious, it is the source of all true art and science." Neruda too is in love with the mysterious. The poem is filled with recurring images of night twilight dusk solitude ocean wind sky and like these. Love and longing permeate these images to make the mysterious alive and beautiful.

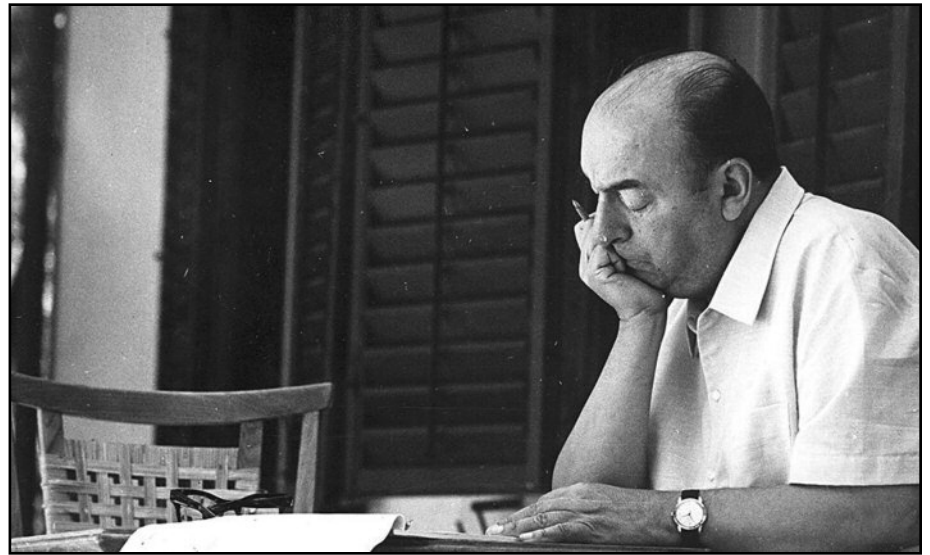
Image of night is central to the poem. Night darkens pathways on the earth and glows those leading to the inner world of the poet helping him liberate himself from the physical objectivity. Night lets him dive into his subliminal, bathe in the inner nakedness and return renewed. The image occurs in all but one canto of the poem. The first canto starts,

"pale blazes twisting at the edge of night
dead smoke invisible dust clouds race"

And the last one begins:

"give me back the great rose the thirst brought to the world
where I am going I suppose things are same
the night important and sad and therein my complaint"

The imagery of darkness and the mystery it creates continue from the poet's



Pablo Neruda

previous work. See the starting lines of *The Song of Despair* the poem Neruda wrote immediately before publishing *venture of the infinite man*:

"The memory of you emerges from the night around me.
The river mingles its stubborn lament with the sea."

And as expected by the poet *venture of the infinite man* did influence his next work *Residence on Earth* often regarded his greatest. Note the lines in the last canto of *venture of the infinite man*:

"wait for me where i am going ah twilight
dinner barcaroles from the sea oh wait for me"

And the starting lines of *The Residence on Earth*,

"Like ashes like oceans swarming,
in the sunken slowness, in the formlessness,
or like high on the road hearing
like bellstrokes cross by crosswise"

Note similarity in the imagery of barcarole beats and bellstroke crisscrossing and the similar rhythm and aesthetic fabric characterizing the two works. Despite these similarities *venture of the infinite man* stands out as a unique work. In it the poet experiences purest soul of poetry as he descends deep into his subconscious; in it he merges realism with surrealism to discover a path that would guide his forthcoming works. Neruda himself confirmed the significance of this new path after some 25 years the book was published:

"Within its smallness and minimal expression, more than most of my work,
it claimed, it secured, the path that I had to follow." – Pablo Neruda

After publishing *venture of the infinite man* Neruda wrote continuously and wrote a lot including his 3-volume *Residence on Earth* and his writings embracing leftist ideology. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1971 and was celebrated in his lifetime as the greatest Spanish poet of the twentieth century. *venture of the infinite man* obviously played a significant role in the poet's accomplishments. The book also beckons other poets to do what Neruda did: indulge in fearless experimentation at some stage of your poetic journey. Sooner the better.

Ajmer Rode has published books of poetry, prose, drama and translation in English and Punjabi. His poem "Stroll in a Particle" is one of the 8 international poems inscribed on a public wall outside the new office complex of Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in Seattle

SPIES AND PROPHETS

Richard Wirick

We are used to the political configuration of a country starting from the bottom up. This is what the Framers saw as the task of representative democracy. Obviously, Americans like to see a similar pattern in other countries. Call it nation-building or spheres of influence, we measure the legitimacy of a government by how the least among them, the people, are treated.

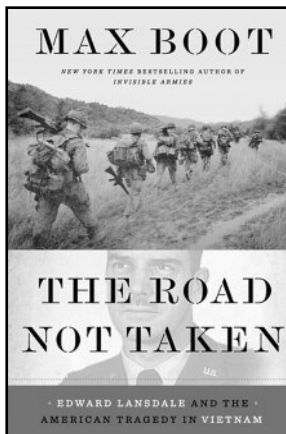
But what if we wish to influence another country's political direction, especially if war has appeared there as an unavoidable stepping stone? Should it be the "top down" approach of rarefied diplomacy, neutrality, something in between? Edward Lansdale had a unique, well-advised answer. He called it "civic action," denoting the practice of giving a rural population a stake in an insurgency so that we—the influencers—appear to be something other than the enemy.

As Max Boot demonstrates in his *The Road Not Taken*, Lansdale was a brilliant, innovative stealth aviator in the OSS, the precursor to the modern CIA. After rising to major general in his WW II exploits, Lansdale first tried civic action while advising the Philippine government during a Marxist rebellion in the early fifties. The Filipino commanders were "shooting through two peasants" to hit the communist guerilla standing behind them. Moving in (literally, roommates) with the defense minister, Roman Magsaysay, Lansdale taught him that Mao Zedong gave the best advice on winning over an oppressed population—"keep the closest possible relations with the common people." Mostly this meant avoiding ambushes and indiscriminate airstrikes, which multiply civilian casualties and frighten an already benighted people. Lansdale gave primitive cameras to Filipino soldiers, so they kept accurate casualty figures and avoided civilian victims. This grass roots approach to body counts was successful, and avoided the top down misrepresentations later given for that phenomena, which came to be known as the order of battle. (Vietnam Commanding General William Westmoreland notoriously thought higher North Vietnamese casualties were the only requirement for winning the "war of attrition" in that country. In fact, the opposite was taking place—less North Vietnamese were dying, American casualties were muted and then falsified, and by the time of Hue in 1968 the attrition myth had been flipped on its head as the U.S. began, by any intelligent estimation, to lose the war.)

Rewind to Lansdale's arrival in Vietnam, circa 1954. He told American Ambassador Lawton Collins to seize control of rural areas of the south being abandoned by the communist Vietminh, who had defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu. Collins and his generals would not listen to their old OSS maverick, whose approach focused on protecting and educating—via a non-communist Maoism—the local village leaders and militia commanders. He not only befriended them, but also cozied up to Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem, who he would try to educate in the constantly shifting vicissitudes of guerilla warfare. Diem had too much baggage and too strange a family for Lansdale's former employer, the CIA, to abide, and was viewed as weak against the rising popular front of the Vietcong. Lansdale's influence hit low tide in the 1963 coup of Diem and his relatives, its blood-spatter rife with CIA fingerprints. (This writer once listened to a rare White House tape of JFK expressing into a dictaphone his "condolences to the Diem family," an odd sentiment in light of their slaughter on his indirect orders.)

Ironically, Lansdale's civic action approach showed signs of success in a strategic-hamlet program, winning over rural peasants by reducing communist infiltration through pacified or "protected" communities. But it was too little, too late. Lansdale came back to Washington, confronting Robert MacNamara, whose notion of the order of battle, wooden and outdated and as mathematical as Westmoreland's, showed Lansdale that the "best and the brightest" were in fact working in paradigms of dangerous ignorance.

Lansdale ended his Vietnam involvement in 1968, just as black pajama-clad Viet Cong rang in the lunar new year with the Tet offensive, blasting their way over the walls of the Hue Citadel and, for good measure, the U.S. Embassy. In hindsight, LBJ's national security advisor Walt Rostow commented that Lansdale's belated, ignored approach of "civic action" exhibited a "kind of last chance" to avoid the fragmentation and collapse



The Road Not Taken:
Edward Lansdale and
the American Tragedy
in Vietnam
Max Boot
Liveright, 338 Pages



Edward G. Lansdale, second from left, arrives in Saigon, August 1965.
(Credit: Associated Press) From *The Road Not Taken*

of American military efforts.

Boot's book is ripe with the panache and swagger that made Lansdale so engaging. Dashing as a movie star, he cultivated, right down to the moustache, his resemblance to Clark Gable. He loved fast cars, planes, speedboats and women, and may have been the closest thing we ever had to a real-life James Bond. The longstanding rumor that Graham Greene used him as the template for his Indochina masterpiece, *The Quiet American*, is probably false. Greene was in Vietnam in 1952, with Lansdale not "officially" arriving until 1954; Lansdale claims he met the British novelist, who denied ever running across the colonel. Lansdale is probably the prototype for Burdick and Lederer's *The Ugly American*, a book far inferior to Greene's and often confused with it. This is especially so given its portrayal of the Lansdale figure, Col. Edwin Barnum, as boorish, egotistical and cruel. Lansdale was, in fact, and as Frances Fitzgerald wrote in *Fire in The Lake*, a man "of artless sincerity, who never thought in terms of systems or larger social forces." He believed in insurgents as people and as embodying the peoples' will, which had to be maneuvered constantly upward and often (Mao again) through the barrel of a gun.

Richard Wirick practices law in Los Angeles.

BROTHER (continued from page 25)

dumpsters and garbage rooms or climbing up trees or fire-exit stairs to spy on adults. (13)

Michael is joined in his grief by Aisha, who herself is grieving the loss of her father. His mother goes through life as though she is treading through a vacuum. An immigrant from Trinidad, she once had hope that, given a chance, her sons could get an education and prove their mettle beyond the confines of The Park. Chariandy, however, presents little in the name of hope for his characters.

Though the underlying themes of marginalization, alienation, poverty, and rootlessness resonate with earlier works in the genre, what sets *Brother* apart is its directness of approach and a sombre, yet energetic tone. Much like the ghetto in which it is set, the novel stays within the confines of its story and, in an unassuming way, steers clear of the conventional motifs of the genre. We get the story, we meet the characters, we see the neighbourhood and, we hear the shot, the shot whose sound stays with us for a very long time, probably forever.

Rajnish Dhawan a playwright and professor. In his works he tries to replicate the streets of Canada on stage.

TROUBLE AND BEAUTY

Bill Yake

Fortune shines. At long last Finn Wilcox's poems and stories have been gathered together to yield *Too Late to Turn Back Now: Prose and Poems, 1980-2016*.

Port Townsend has been Wilcox's gravitational center for decades — with trajectories to work the forests of the Olympics and Cascades, ride the rails, explore the peaks and ancient monasteries of southern China, fish the Strait, raise a family, and serve as a co-editor for Empty Bowl Press. He and Jerry Gorsline edited the classic Pacific Northwest anthology *Working the Woods, Working the Sea* (1989, 2008). For those interested in the Empty Bowl artists Michael Daley (2007) provides a concise recounting (see citations).

Too Late to Turn Back Now brings together:

Here Among the Sacrificed (Empty Bowl, 1984) — poems, photos, and stories of riding freight trains.

Nine Flower Mountain (Tangram, 2002) — poems from travels “through the southern sacred mountains of China.”

Lesson Learned. Love Poems. (Tangram, 2008) — title self-descriptive.

Not Letting Go — new poems and stories including work from *Freight Train* (Longhouse, 2011)

The collection's title is taken from Wilcox's poem of the same name, which is — in turn — derived from a rant-taunt-warning yelled down the bar by an eccentric and unnamed Port Townsend artist:

It's too late to turn back now,
until you poets realize that,
you'll remain cowards,
not artists.

“Too Late to Turn Back Now”

The intent of that demeaning warning is ambiguous, but in setting a shallow, slick present against the rambunctious, communal past, Wilcox seems to opt for the *old days*. And based on the content of this collection, Finn's perspectives and life are, in general, tributes to root times: the times of hoboes, freight trains, sustained community, outdoor work, and the hermits and immortals of shrouded Chinese peaks.

In short:

the old days —
long before silky-slick cars, boutique dogs and slippery money arrived...

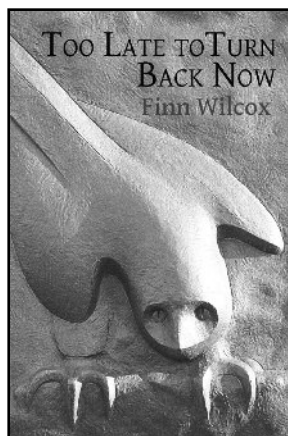
Taken from this perspective, both the poem and the full collection have aspects of riddles. It seems that Wilcox's choices in life and art have mostly defied that unnamed artist's pointed advice, with progress measured in understanding the old values.

A few words about each section.

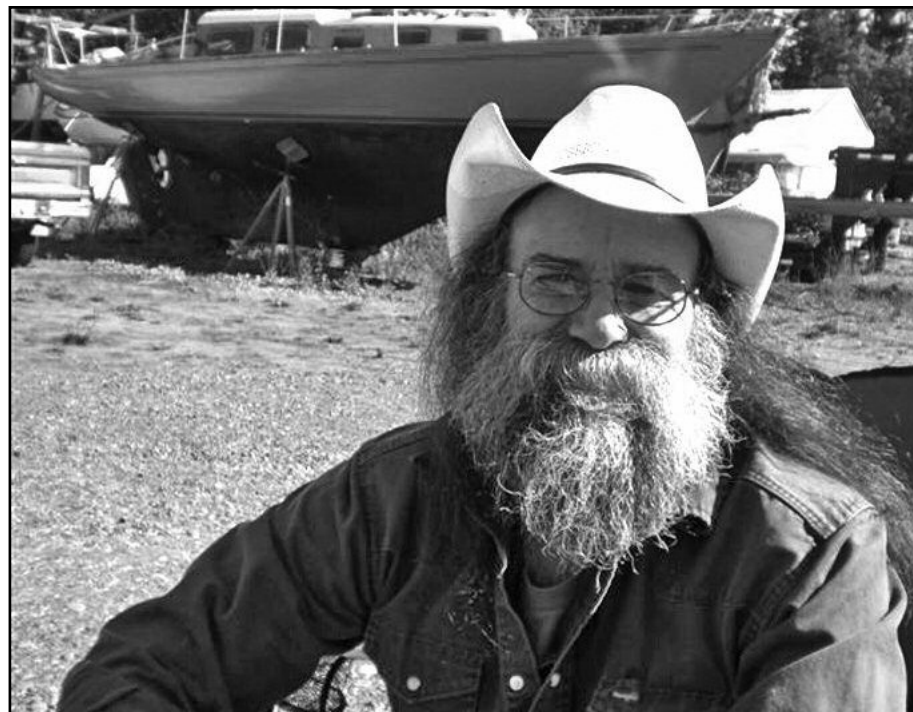
Here Among the Sacrificed

Wilcox comes across as both a straightforward and a complicated fellow — attracted to both trouble and beauty, rambling and family, the work of the body and the work of the mind. In his first collection he seems to be working out his craft — finding a voice — as he records his rambles. There are anecdotes and poems. Sometimes the text reads like an edited diary, at other times as something of an instruction manual for riding the rails, or perhaps a narrative joke told over fortified wine.

Plenty of hard-won anecdotes and scruffy, colorful characters here. As Bill Porter (Red Pine) opines in his blurb, the pieces are often of the “sort I'd expect to find someday among the men's clothing at Goodwill: survivors of the real world...”



Too Late to Turn Back Now: Prose and Poems, 1980-2016
Finn Wilcox
Empty Bowl Press. \$18



Finn Wilcox

Here are some rough gems of metaphor and vernacular:

...it's a dead yard.
...the moan and squawk of wheels...
...switch engine banging freight cars together like some huge typewriter finishing off a long American Story...
...no meaner ride than an old flatwheeler.
...the Midnight Ghost...flies all night through the blowing fog.

My attraction to this section springs from hearing the trains rumble and whistle as I passed into sleep each night as a kid on Spokane's South Hill. The downtown yards and tracks held the allure of grime and danger and distant depots.

Later, monitoring air pollution along the river corridor, I'd look in on the winter fires of the ragged hoboes camped near Inland Metals. Heating fires were okay, we just tried to keep them free of creosoted ties and insulated wire.

There are yards like this along the tracks all over the West. As Finn says, “all the iron and concrete heaped into order.”

In those days I lived in a coldwater flat in Peaceful Valley, a poor section of Spokane downstream from The Falls. One neighbor was a peg-legged Indian. He carried a fighting knife; came into town to pick up a disability check and fill a prescription for the codeine that tamed his piercing headaches. Around a night fire in my distressed backyard he'd recount nightmares — trains plunging through flames and bound for Hell. I regret I don't remember his name.

Finn's compatriots seem, for the most part, to have been a bit more convivial.

Much of the value of *Here Among the Sacrificed* is like the value of oral history. A first-hand record of an era and culture veiled from most of America's view by comfort and denial. And Steve Johnson's photos, in period black and white, add a good deal to the verity, texture, and atmosphere the times.

Nine Flower Mountain

In 1991 Wilcox traveled through the cities and sacred mountains of southeastern China with Bill Porter (Red Pine). Porter recorded their travels in *South of the Yangtze* (1991); Finn published *Nine Flower Mountain* as a suite of ten poems with Tangram (2002).

There are exceptional poems here. Finn's work can sparkle and chill. Danger and trouble haunt the path to beauty.

Travel Advice
Homage to Red Pine

In China
a bus nearly empty
tells you a lot of where
you are headed,
a puddle of puke
on the floor,
even more about
who drives you there.

The title poem may be the most potent of this section — encapsulating the essence of the trip in a trek to the aerie of a hermit nun (a Buddhist? a Taoist?):

...A few tufts of
Wind-blown bamboo
The persistent pine
Growing straight out of stone

A place so graceful
So tough and real
Even the Immortals
Feel a shiver up the spine...

“Nine Flower Mountain”

Like several of Wilcox’s poems in this section, this one delivers that shiver in the poem’s final line. I will not ruin it with disclosure.

Another exceptional poem, “Three for the Pearl River”, consists of three haiku-like, Chinese-inspired quatrains intertwining a frequent image from early Chinese poets — the moon’s reflection on the river — with modern images that echo those reflections: the effervescent sexuality of youth — nests of pink chiffon in the raven hair of adolescent girls, and the neon light reflected in the river as lovers are mirrored in glistening lipstick.

There are other fine poems here: contemplations on mortality, riffs on the ‘mountains of mist’ and ‘cities of dust’ aesthetic of Chinese poetry of Sung and Tang dynasties.

While I may have an occasional quibble — can a mummified concubine simultaneously appear as both *unhappy* and *patient*? — it’s clear that Finn has extended his craft and opened our senses to the worlds of both ancient and modern China.

These are not poems destined for the Goodwill drop box. Wilcox has created some eminently memorable, and often elegant, poems from his Chinese travels.

Lesson Learned. Love Poems

This collection is among my all-time favorites.

In poem after poem dedicated to lovers, sons, and friends — but most especially to his wife Pat — Wilcox reveals his compassion, growth, and highest regard for the complex values and facets of love.

I’ll include only the following excerpt from an earlier review (Yake, 2011):

“As I read these poems, think them through, find from which lines backbone chills and the throat constricts, one thing is clear: love is no one thing.

The following motivations, experiences, adjectives, nouns and markers appear in this collection either as love, as one of its nearly indistinguishable surrogates, or as a symptom or result of love:

Love is the memory and yearning that comes in dreams.
It provides a balm from wandering alone.
“Love is simple courage.” Still it can cause the poet to beg. And begging, for the self-sufficient — and Wilcox is certainly that, requires courage.
It is affection and attraction (of course); attachment and laughter.
As one of the collection’s epigraphs, The New Testament, and Woody Guthrie all insist, “...God is love.”
Love is sacrifice; major league compassion; placing another’s welfare, happiness, and even survival, first.

It is warmth against the cold, home against the wild. It is redemption.
Somehow love is at the root of grief and may or may not be the same as longing. Grief and longing manifest as traps or prison cells.
And love can impair poetic critique — “It’s beautiful you say... / But you love all my poems, / how can I trust someone / who would take a bullet for me?”

(from “Love Poem with Jerry in It”).

The list unfurls — myriad aspects of what Wilcox calls ‘love’s unfathomable knots.’”
For those of us drawn to the work of Robert Sund, Tim McNulty, Clem Starke, Jerry Martien and their illustrious ilk — *Lesson Learned* is a necessary acquisition.

Not Letting Go

The final section of the book is dedicated to Wilcox’s friend, the poet Robert Sund (1929-2001). That dedication includes this passage:

Shortly before his death he (Sund) was talking with my wife and me about all the haywire things he’d done to scrape by as a poet. After a long pause in the conversation he looked up at us smiling and said, “I’ve done some ridiculous ideas in my life and only failure has saved me.” A hardy amen to that, brother Sund. We will miss you.

Not Letting Go contains a grab-bag of Wilcox’s later writings: anecdotes, tales, haiku, and longer poems. Some — often full of irony - seem eccentric if not a bit haywire; others are lucid and humane as the alternation of forest rain and forest sunshine.

Nominees for the glistening:

The plain pleasures of a day spent fishing for surf perch. (“White Trash Zen”) Affectionate workday anecdotes of decency and mutual understanding between coop/ forest contract workers. (“Daniel”, “Married”, “Making It Right”) A clear-eyed assessment of a decade in the forests. (“On My Tenth Anniversary as a Treeplanter”)

Nominees for the mildly eccentric:

An ancient dog preparing to settle “...his bony ass down” as *ars poetica*. (“How to Write a Poem”) Hemingway gifting Picasso with a box of grenades. (“Art”) A “Fish Tale” turning on boredom and hooking an outsized bluegill on a hook baited with solidified snot.

It’s how we work our way towards understanding. Understanding the life we’ve lived, understanding the world we’ve lived it in. In the current season this poem seems especially apt:

The one time
I experienced what my Buddhist friends
call enlightenment,
that recognition, sharp and clear
as a shot of cheap whiskey,
was packing my tree bag
on a landing pooled in drained skidder oil
in a clear-cut
big as the town I lived in,
understanding
finally and fully
the rotting extravagance of greed.

“Outdoor Work”

If your library is missing Finn’s work; you now have the chance to fill the gaps all at once. My advice? Do it.

Bill Yake lives near Olympia, Washington. His books include *This Old Riddle: Cormorants and Rain* (Radiolarian Press, 2004) and *Unfurl, Kite, and Veer* (Radiolarian Press, 2010).

EUCLID'S ORCHARD

Linda Rogers

There are stars in the firmament of Canadian literature, and then there are the planets, enduring voices we turn to for knowledge and comfort. Beyond fashion and flashing trajectory, they persevere, reliable in that part of the sky held up by so many women.

Theresa Kishkan is one of those sky mothers, who, more than unreliable points of navigation, home fires burning, are real steady home.

Her writing reveals the Aristotelian principle of unity, the Oneness of being that she has learned from her own proximity to the natural world and belief systems. Her essays and poems breathe with the entities she encounters in the phenomenal world: trees, fish, birds, flowers, grass, as, without

pedagogy, she affirms the maternal prerogative. We are all children of this earth.

Her first essay, "Herakleitos on the Yalakom," a personal story resonating the Book of Isaiah, begins with fishing and allegorical association with the fisher of men. Her father was a natural philosopher, but unnaturally cruel in human relations. That is the sad human story. The bitterness of sour grapes eaten by parents is passed on to children, who either swallow or spit. In her case, Kishkan has made a mission of nurturing everything in her surround, words, family and world, spitting out seeds of wisdom.

This leads me to a puzzle, which this publication may resolve. A few years ago, I was asked at the last minute to write a river memoir to replace one written by Kishkan, who had withdrawn. Why me, I wondered and still do, as we both, as women writers struggling upstream to lay our eggs, wrestled with sperm fish, the dark angels of patrimony. Now, as I read it, I think I understand she had a larger vision, this book.

Her story is a difficult to deliver and expose grace notes. Now, more than ever, mindful of what is sacred, she remains devoted to the female imperative to peaceful change. As Herakleitos said, we never step in the same river twice.

And perhaps we can be forgiven for extrapolating Hera, daughter of the Titans, striding out of the title, manifesting in every page of this book of the lost and found.

In "Tokens," on the narrative level at least, the story of her foundling mother, found in marriage to a linear person, a series of phenomenal objects link parents to lost children. This is Kishkan's genius, joining the spirit and material worlds, her familiar and ours, in details that link in the music of time, mysteries emerging from silence.

I wanted the music to be coded, wanted to believe that messages might come in (Handel's) ancient verses, as I wished for a message to emerge from that telegram, an invisible milk or lemon juice exposed to heat:

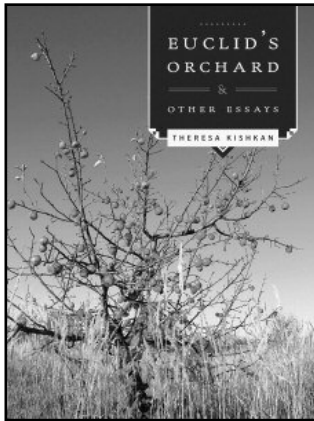
And in "West of the 4th Meridian, a Libretto for Migrating Voices," she iterates the themes that sleep and wake in our lives of constant exile, the current one perhaps the last as we comprehend the gorgeous fragility of the world Kishkan describes so perfectly, so lyrically, weaving family history into the seasons of birth, copulation and death.

"I am holding the family song, a composition almost erased."

In "Poignant Mountain" these lyric threads are picked up and woven into a tartan skirt, worn by a little girl who gathered wool before she had the ability to write memory into text. Her pre-school days in Matsqui are another song map for her and for the reader as she listens to the grasses.

In the memory was recognition: that something I'd once had but hadn't remembered losing was returning to me, a painted wooden horse coming home through tall grass.

It can be argued that the vogue for diversity in fiction draws us to the surprising, the perfumes of exotic flowers and locations and away from proximate narratives. We are enamoured with the other, forgetting that Canada's past is also other, valuable empirical data, our history plain and simple, all of it worth framing in story. Our grasses are as musical as those blown by the trade winds or monsoons that bring refreshment



Euclid's Orchard & Other Essays
Theresa Kishkan
Mother Tongue
Publishing, paper, 2017



Theresa Kishkan

and refugees to our shores.

And every seed, carried by wind, is the start of new life. The Chapter "Ballast," annotated by quotes from the da Vinci Notebooks, is a sketchbook of memories, rose cuttings, horse radish and jars of jam and jelly. Some of it is ballast, left behind in migrations great and small, but all of it lives on in the mind of an artist and on the pages of this book, illustrated with family photographs.

Euclid's Orchard is a scrapbook of smells, sounds, photos, plants, people and places, serving as memoir and history book, a living map of a time and place, mid-century on the Pacific Coast of Canada, where First Nations and Whitecomers still compare mythologies and reconcile the trauma of contact and the transplants, plant and human, are still hardening up.

Kishkan's own slips have taken, according to their separate destinies. One son, a mathematician, turns out to be the spirit child of her father, who in spite or because of his tyrannies was seeking a perfect equation, and this brings her to Euclid's garden, the divine symmetry of coincidence.

This book, her quilts, her orchard, her life are all part of that sacred geometry. As Euclid wrote, "Things that coincide with one another are equal to one another." This is what she knew at the beginning of her life when the trauma of her mother's separation from family disrupted the family symmetry, making the star maps so challenging, and what she is coming home to.

In these essays she reveals to herself and her reader the holy feminine, mending the broken stars and reconciling the numbers with the threaded needle that leads her to completion, "a sequence emptied of its numbers."

Linda Rogers, who used her tartan skirts as pen wipers in the days of dipping ink, has short fiction in the recent collections *Cl-fi* and *Carter Vanderbilt Cooper 7*, and her most recent fiction is *Bozruk*, a Turkish memoir. Forthcoming in Spring 2018 is *Crow Jazz*, a collection of short fiction from Mother Tongue.

NEARLY NORMAL (continued from page 20)

multiple revisions and rewritings that she underwent in her quest to get her first memoir published. For any aspiring writers out there, her story emphasizes the necessity of persistence and unwavering conviction. For those of us who just enjoy a good book, it is a reminder of how lucky we are that our favourite books ever make it to our hands.

Although this book is full of quirky and heartwrenching childhood memories, intriguing glimpses into life as a model, and revealingly honest moments of marriage and motherhood, I am somehow left untouched by this narrative. The components scream for attention and empathy, yet, the whole skates across the surface of my mind, skittering off the other side, soon forgotten.

Chelsea Pastorchik is a frequent contributor to the PRRB.

THE MIND MAKES UP THE WORLD

Richard Wirick

In his mid-career books like *Brainchildren* and *Consciousness Explained*, the philosopher and neuroscientist Daniel Dennett seemed hell bent on showing how a comprehending mind could be built from a mindless process of natural selection. How this happens has perplexed philosophers since Aristotle, who blew Aeolian wind into the skull, and Descartes, who proved the irreducibility of consciousness but fobbed the leap from matter to thought back to his Catholic God. And not a lot of progress has been made since then—the same problem of what a mind *in fact is* has perplexed the heaviest hitters like Kant, Hume and Wittgenstein, and even though our understanding of the inner workings of proteins, neurons and DNA is more profoundly realized than ever before, the matter of how our minds came to be by arising out of them has largely remained a mystery.

In examining the building blocks of consciousness, Dennett starts with billions of years of what he calls “irreplaceable design work,” performed not by God but by natural selection. Natural selection takes the crude functions that exist in sentient but non self-conscious animals and builds on them. The functional components from which selfhood develops appear to slowly grow through evolution in what he call a “sort of” form. An example is free will, at least as it is currently understood. The amygdala, the part of the brain that registers fear, may not have true autonomy. In fact, it is something of an industrial robot of the mind, a little like the spleen is to the dead blood cells of body. But as aeons went on, its power augmented to where it enabled the mind to sense and then avoid danger. In this manner, the path of automatic, instinctual fear that we see in almost any animal led, according to Dennett, from determinism to free will: “A whole can be freer,” he writes, “than the sum of its parts.” What began as a reflexive protection impulse evolved into a process of assessing, gauging, choosing the path of least danger to the knowing subject.

The approach has been, of all the schools of the philosophy of mind, given the rough label of “functionalism.” The workings of neurons and cognitive systems simply turn richer and more deft in their functioning. Suddenly impulse and instinct give way to the enormous qualitative leap into consciousness. The physical remains a physical process—there is none of Ryle’s ‘ghost in the machine’—but something rises up in the cranial vault that is ghostly, spectral, seemingly untraceable to anything as crude as a physical process. The narrative arc of functionalism is easy to follow, well argued, but at least for *this* philosopher of mind, has always seemed to leave something out. In the formulation of one of Dennett’s critics, physicalist hypotheses skip over the process by which “the water of the brain becomes the wine of consciousness.”

Accordingly, one of the obsessive, briny focuses of this book is Dennett’s war with David Chalmers, another big-brained, furious debater on the origins and ontology of consciousness, whose basic approach to things is called “instrumentalism.” (Their debates were profiled brilliantly in a *New Yorker* article by Joshua Rothman.) He is one of the critics who see Dennett by-passing the challenging issue of getting from brain data to the trick of the brain that seems too dazzling to be of common, merely human origin. Dennett feels that all one has is to explain the functions, and that there does not have to be a hard boundary between first-person experience and third-person explanations. They would simply be two different perspectives on the same phenomena. Take the two perspectives on a sugar cube—the description of a sugar molecule and the taste of sweetness: “From the outside, it looks like neurons; from the inside it feels like

From Bacteria to Bach and Back

The Evolution of Minds



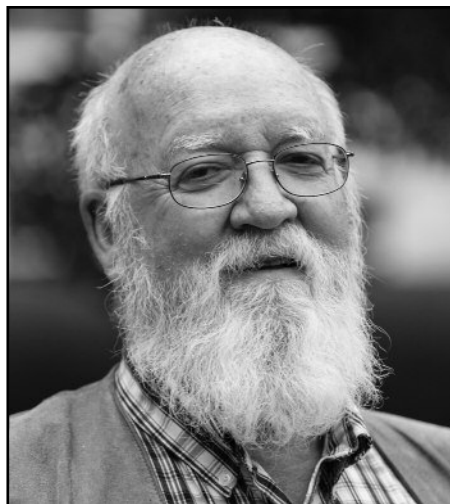
DANIEL C. DENNETT

From Bacteria to Bach & Back:

The Evolution of Minds

Daniel C. Dennett

Norton: 476 Pages



Daniel C. Dennett

consciousness.”

This will not do for Chalmers, who feels that cataloguing the third person data could not explain the existence of a first person point of view. Dennett demands that Chalmers formulate an experiment that would at least make the notion of “first-person data” or “experiences” provable or non-provable. Chalmers so far hasn’t come up with same. Chalmers is more open to odd epistemologies in his search for what it means to think. He has lately explored arguments in favor of “panpsychism,” the idea that consciousness might be “a fundamental property of the universe,” upon which the brain somehow draws.” This is similar to William James’s neutral monism, which has a tidy explanatory power. Cut one way, the history of the world is simply the history of objective physical objects; cut another way, it is the psychological history of human beings.

All of this and more in the ever-shifting world of logico-analytic philosophy is on display here by one of our liveliest and most readable philosophers. Dennett’s appreciation of the artistic consciousness is unique, attractive, and shows that he looks as much for sparkle and verve in the world than the question of what about it makes philosophical sense.

Richard Wirick practices law in Los Angeles.

ROTHENBERG (continued from page 26)

done by celebrating both the long and short gaze at the quotidian.

A tail-end Baby Boomer like myself, the poet was just getting started at the end of the Beat and Black Mountain eras, but draws from the proprioceptive ways of the open form long poem and lyric peregrinations of Olson and Creeley and the long line yawp and comic confessions of Ginsberg, Corso, et al. A self-styled Zen Cowboy as language poet Ron Silliman refers to him in his cover blurb.

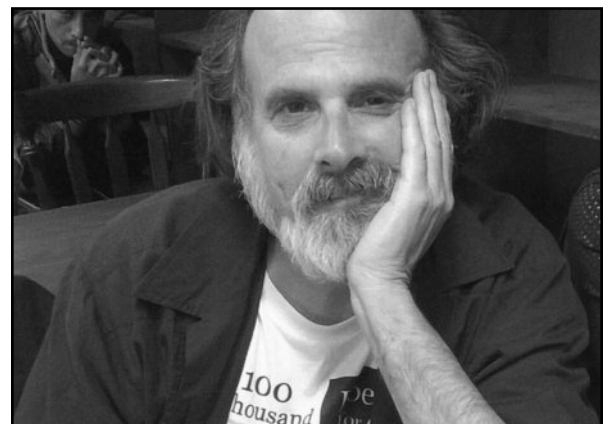
I wasn’t familiar with the term, but it seems apt somehow. The notion of how to reconcile the observances of a materialist, capitalist life style with the emotional/spiritual need to transcend the language invention of the self is ground zero here.

Even the titles of the five sub-sections of the book seem to speak of the rip rap slabs of twenty-first century North American peripatetic wanderings: *Grown Up Cuba*, *Drawing the Shade*, *The Man Inside*, *Stargazers*, and *Hurricane*.

Knowing when to close the drapes on the glare of the media sun, when to turn one’s back on Dionysian alternate states of consciousness and entertainment and focus on the inner man, and grow old with an Apollonian grace, that may be the enterprise that grips all of us baby boomers in our retirement years.

Finally, a word about the illustrations. On the cover and before each section break, Ms D’Angelo’s lovely nude acrobats tumble in head-protecting somersaults through the various stages of life. Adam (?) feint/shoves against Eve(?) as they walk to the exit of the frame, a pelican flanking her, a small bird between them, A nude female with a tiny bird on her back practices a stretching exercise before a male companion. Two nude young men console one another, one offering his hand, the other in the thinker position. A man offering his boy the planet Saturn. Always the little I-told-you-so bird standing in mute testimony of the scene. Neo-surreal, symbolic, emblematic Read into the image what you will: they offer. the same whimsical sense of play as the poetry.

Richard Stevenson has recently retired from a thirty-year gig teaching at Lethbridge College. His most recent books are a long poem sequence, *Rock, Scissors, Paper: The Clifford Olson Murders* (Dreaming Big Publications, USA, 1916) and *A Gaggle of Geese* (haikai poetry, Alma Press, U.K.)



Michael Rothenberg

EXTRA ILLICIT SONNETS

Linda Rogers

The sonnet, Shakespearean, Petrarchan ad hoc, is about shape-changing. This sonneteer is a trickster from the Africville clan, a philosopher fool, sometimes the hellfire deacon in black, sometimes the chorus of sceptical crows in the Disney movie, “I be done seen ‘bout everything/when I see an elephant fly,” and othertimes Brando in Paris.

He moves from sermon to scherzo in the time it takes a bottleneck to slide down a G-string, shazaam, “Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. George Elliot Clarke, the magician/musician, who “like(s) to love/ As nakedly as I write.”

Sonneteers make sultry music, their voices transposing from Donne, to Mason Williams of the pissonnet, to the invalid midnight kitty, Elizabeth Barrett Browning. They morph to the context, anything to get the beloved, a dark ladyboy, a wyfe, a Victorian husband, into that thorny bed of roses.



Extra Illicit Sonnets
George Elliott Clarke
Exile Editions, 2015

I want to make love as if I have hooves
And horn and bray in brazen, Maltese must!

The sonneteers are all horny, but horns play in more than one key, even when they sound like apothecaries grinding bones for the ultimate cure for loneliness. From abba, not the nauseating pop group, to ababa, the rhymes and rhythms vary to carry the plenipotentiary’s message. Italian, Shakespearean, Clarkian, they deliver their political blows (and what is politics but group sex?) in the arena of the personal.

Sweet little lamb who loves a buttery,
Battering ram, you ask. Do I obey
Enough? Well, you’ve donned silk, but have
Nothing beneath. *That’s* a blessing without disguise...

Clarke is not devoted to rhyme, which appears internally and sometimes overtly, to surprise. In the informal scurry to remove the outer layers of skin, he takes his raunchy verse direct to the marrow, or whatever bodily fluids: sweat, jism, spit. In Berlin, “you were juicy/ as a *kissel*, delectably juicy.”

My poet, you blurt, *Love*,
But –really – spurt, *Lust!*

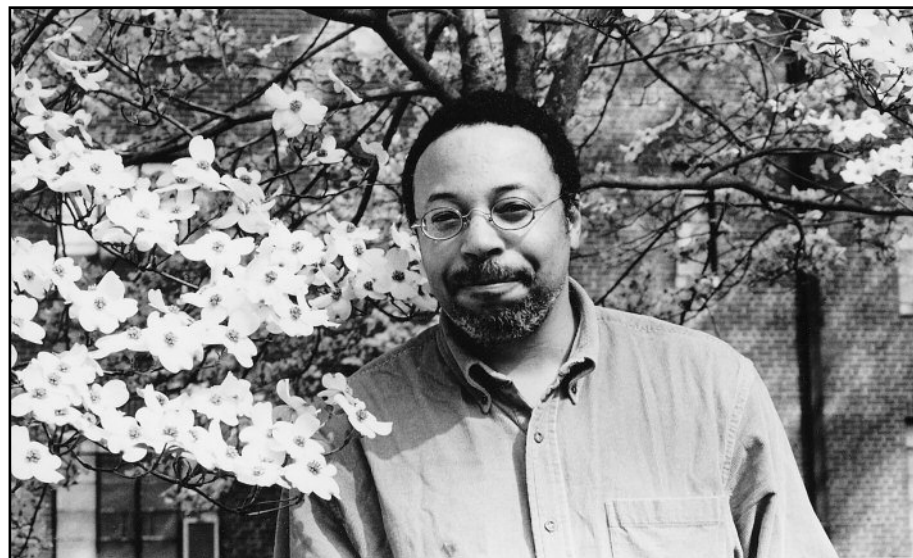
Down there, pardon the geological pun, differences don’t compute, neither age nor ethnicity. These poems, a dialogue, are a rollicking celebration of love without obstruction or impediment, the exterior of exclusivity. Clarke’s lover and beloved couple beyond boundaries, beyond form, the construct of repression.

Could I couch you in a cushion of ink-
Posh, nocturnal words – and picture you, white,
In black letters, on a white sheet – white
Candle inflaming night, shaming moonlight,

With his pen, oh pardon, the puns keep coming, he annihilates the traditional contexts of poetry and love.

If *amore* is light more real than Roman
Marble, then there is no empire outside us.

If deconstruction is a crime, then Clarke has chosen an “erotic eldress” in his audacious book partner Claire Weissman Wilks, Bonnie to his gun blazing Clyde, whose unrestrained drawings define sensuality. Ripe is the right word to define two artists in their prime, Donne’s erotic islands, linear and literary. Sexual love is its own beatitude, as holy as anything holy, holier than the rectitude of priests and poets who colour inside the lines, in the safety zone, the safety dance of the non-confessional.



George Elliot Clarke

Like Shakespeare, defender of the status quo, and the non-conforming Catholic Donne, Clarke has reason in his random rhyme. His *jouissance* is deliberate. Lust is the breakable toy he takes to the playground of politics, and humour is his engine of joy, the battery in that toy. At once lovemaking and a comedic commentary on lovemaking, the poems, with their reckless impetus, break the sound barrier with sounds calibrated by a poet who understands music as transformation and life as ephemeral.

“He is so attached to his sadness,” Carol Shields once said to me about a mutual friend who is beyond funny. Humour, with its analytical energy exploded in laughter, is a powerful polemic tool. Clarke, the sermonist, disguises himself in crow feathers and laughs. He throws his voice but it says the same thing about the one in the many, the power of love or any of its sisters: lust, affection, and friendship.

Clarke’s poetic energy is his *non-servium*; and the force is with him as he romps through page after page, laughing all the way.

In life and in poetry, death always follows sex. *Le petit mort* is the portal to heaven, as Donne asserted, “ascension to a better library.” Ibid.

Linda Rogers is the author of *Bozuk*, a Turkish memoir and “You Need Me at the River,” from *Cli-Fi*, an anthology of Climate Fiction from Exile.

WOODS OF MEMORY (continued from page 24)

alike. Given the degree of emotional and psychological investment necessary to rebuild after catastrophic wartime defeat, there’s no shortage here of humiliation, resentment, human apathy, or sorrow. No shame or pain is ignored: from the horror at what befalls Sayoko, left shattered for life—and not simply by the soldiers—then Seiji, left blinded for his doomed, heroic action. Most controversially, what is not ignored either is Medoruma’s disgust with the self-interested, consciously self-delusory, sell-out by government officials to U.S. control under the guise of “doing what’s best for the village.” It’s the other side of the coin from these same officials who refuse to acknowledge Japan’s own horrific crimes against humanity and sexual violence against women in the same damn war.

This is a novel that reminds us what it means to survive, and the often appalling cost of that survival. The stream of consciousness technique that Medoruma employs at times makes it a challenging read, but the curious journey of Seiji’s old, collectible harpoon-head from hospital, then hand to hand through the U.S. war in Vietnam, and linking with the 9/11 Twin-Towers terror in New York creates a narrative thread that’s inescapable. En route we get a look at the new, rebuilding Okinawa with its shopping malls, reconciliation-minded high-schools, and highways. Through it all, the island trees stand in memory, alone in outliving the scars of what the characters in these tragedies have seen and known.

Trevor Carolan’s current work is *New World Dharma: Interviews and Encounters with Buddhist Teachers, Writers and Leaders* (SUNY Press, 2016). He writes from British Columbia, Canada.

HITTING THE MOTHER LODE

Emily Izsak

Writing a review of a book of reviews is the kind of meta-exercise that gets the Punkhole, well... wet. Kenneth Warren's *Captain Poetry's Sucker Punch: A Guide to the Homeric Punkhole, 1980-2012* spans thirty-two years, 470 pages, and four ad hoc sections: Semiotic Sobriety (1), Archaic Sexuality (2), Alchemical Precision (3), and Pharmacological Utopia (4). Like a good Jungian, I searched for obsessions—themes that reoccur over a uniquely comprehensive collection of texts. But whose obsessions are they? Warren's? The Captain's? The Punkhole's? Mine?

In his afterword, Ammiel Alcalay deconstructs the book's title. He writes, "Sucker, however, seems a particularly American word, during the Gold Rush, to denote a 'greenhorn' or a 'simpleton,' though its primary meaning was still 'a young mammal before it's weaned,' or 'a child at the breast.'" Motherhood is a reoccurring theme in *Captain Poetry's Sucker Punch*. It's somebody's obsession.

In an essay titled, "Anne Waldman: Beat Mama," Warren discusses the "maternal axis of poetic language." He claims that by becoming a mother herself, Waldman "has attained a heightened awareness that speed has multiplied the wounds in the Beat corpus and that her mission is to heal them."

Warren calls poetry Stacy Szymaszek's "new birth canal," "the word" is Eileen Myles' lifeless child. He titles his essay on Sharon Doubiago, "Ovulation is the Transfiguration." Warren notes, "to understand what [Kathy] Acker is really after... is to hold in check metaphors of creativity as childbirth." It seems to me that Warren stands with Acker. Creativity isn't childbirth. Criticism is.

As a reviewer, Warren has far more in common with the self-sacrificing Frances Boldereff than the large and in charge Charles Olson. In "The Blood of the Muse," a review of *Charles Olson and Frances Boldereff: A Modern Correspondence*, Warren sees Boldereff as muse, but also as martyr, judge, and supplier of unconditional love.

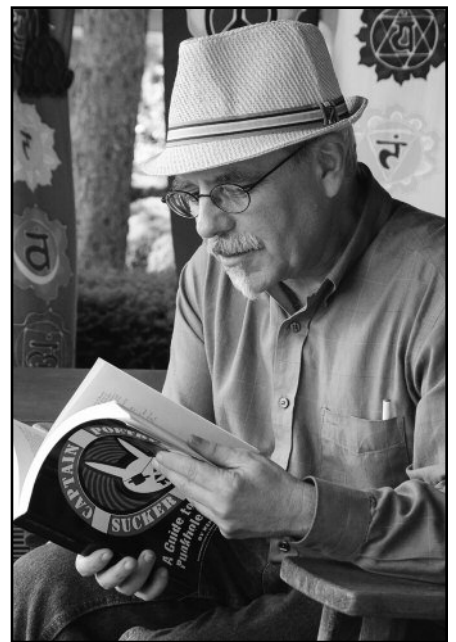


Captain Poetry's Sucker Punch: A Guide to the Homeric Punkhole, 1980-2012
Kenneth Warren
BlazeVOX, 2012

Captain Poetry's Sucker Punch: A Guide to the Homeric Punkhole is a paragon of self-sacrifice, judgment, and unconditional love—the maternal trifecta. Kenneth Warren was our poetry mom.

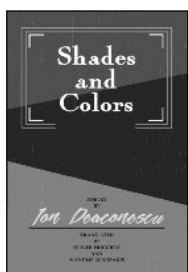
Whether reviews are for the writer or the reader, they are certainly not for the reviewer. 469 pages over thirty-two years is tireless; it is selfless. Warren, like any good mother, addresses our flaws but loves us anyway. A more cynical reviewer of a book of reviews may perceive Warren's obsession with motherhood (especially in the context of women writers) as antifeminist—that such an insistence on connecting women writers to their supposed biological imperative understates the richness and complexity of their work. But for Warren, mothering is not limiting. It is a point of connection. He does it too.

In "Phil Smith: Dada, Dodo, Daddy," Warren addresses Smith's decision to "break the role barriers" and act as his son's primary caregiver. He shrugs off interest in this role reversal as for "those concerned with questions about the sociology of the contemporary avant-garde." In "Rochelle Rainer: Unisex Craft," Warren writes, "within a newly crafted canon, [Rainer's] book indicates just how problematic statements on craft can be when attempting to discover any useful knowledge about gender and poetry." Warren's focus on motherhood transcends gender; it is not an attempt to discover knowledge about gender and poetry, but a (perhaps subconscious) effort to understand his own position in relation to the bleeding Punkhole.



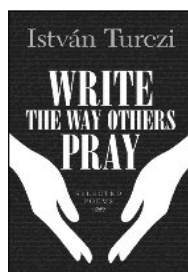
Kenneth Warren

Emily Izsak is the author of *Whistle Stops: A Locomotive Serial Poem*, which was published by Signature Editions in April 2017. She lives in Toronto, Ontario.



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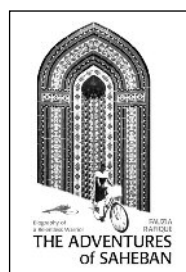
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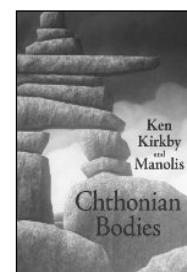
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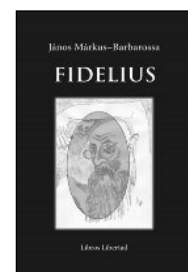
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978-1-926763-43-9
\$20.00

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THE SUMMER BOOK

Linda Rogers

To those who are lucky, good sex is not a hotel room with champagne in a bucket of ice, it is freedom the way children experience summer: raw food in the woods, huckleberries and, thanks to the crow who, First Nations taught us, has a song for it, ripe salmonberries, forts made of twigs and ferns or logs on the beach where foreplay was comic books, the smell of the paper, jokes, then silence, the moment before clothes came off and we saw one another naked for the first time. These are some of the song lines revisited in *The Summer Book*.

To every thing there is a season, but the Rainforest summers of innocence riding the wave to experience leak out of their frames as magical images morph into magical thinking, memories of summer past and present with the power to keep readers warm by the fires of winter and remind them of their connection to the living things and places that defined them before climate change became a disfiguring reality.

They say desire is the enemy of peace but the expectation of summer captured in drawings, post card stories and memoirs is the definition of hope in a world that has been assaulted by the artificial manipulation and destruction of our environment. The contributors to this collection do not offer solutions to global problems but create the possibility of building on memory, the catalyst for dreams, as Christine Lowther reminds us in “Immersed.”

“Immersion is how I pursue my deepest possible bonding with place and planet.” From bonding comes the strength of commitment.

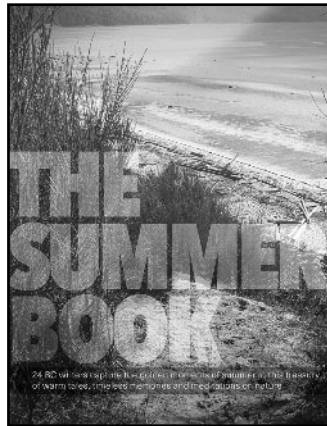
The Summer Book is a collection of dream sequences, part memory, part desire, detail beside empirical detail, an impressionist celebration of clean, but ambiguous, water, life giver and life destroyer, bountiful harvests from sea and land, benign sunlight, singing birds and insects and children playing in safe parameters. This book of the once was and still may be possible is not to be read in a piece as if it were a novel, but savoured like an al fresco meal that lasts until sunset, and sometimes beyond. The picnic is salmon cooked over fires, lemonade, beer, berries and watermelon, and the taste lingers.

Separated by understated linocuts, watercolours, etchings, drawings and photos by Mona Fertig and contributors Gary Sim, Briony Penn and Peter Haas, in black and white, that contribute to the sense of scrapbook rather than artefact, the memoirs are more sketches than complete narratives. Together they form a collage, their edges touching and overlapping like waves on the beach.

Theresa Kishkan ends her “Love Song” with a meal that blesses the subsequent accounts, many of them told by mature writers who remember the time before innocence was brought down by experience, a premonition supported by Brian Brett, in “Where are the Snows of Yesterday’s Summer,” the story that ends the book with a reminder that doubt invades calm waters.

Their words are notes and together they sing. These writers seldom proselytise, the snapshots are neither homilies nor sermons, but they do make the heart constrict. This is what we have, or had, all of it threatened by fossil fuel and the agendas of governments serving the wrong masters. This is what the tumbling catalogue of phenomenal observations: tree, river, sunset, fish means to us individually and collectively. We connect the dots, or not, because this is a book of longing and the desired is defined in sensory details rather than the larger arc of narrative.

Death and birth by water, the catalyst in every memoir is never more poignant than in Brett’s consideration of death by water as one way out, we assume, of adolescent



The Summer Book
an anthology of B.C.
Writers
Mona Fertig, ed., Mother
Tongue Publishing, 2017,
paper, 224 pages



Mona Fertig

confusion about sexual identity or Claudia Cornwall’s “A Red Canoe” when, after her first baby drowned in her primal waters, she paddled through grief. In every stroke, muscle memory reconnected her to the continuum that grief had interrupted. These two writers stroke and paddle through common recollections of summer, baptism by water, the taste of blackberries or French fries and vinegar.

It is the birth and rebirth of the land that every writer, From DC Reid, feeling the tug of a fish on a hook the way a mother experiences birth, to Harold Rhenisch who, in “Neon Bees of the Sun,” sips the sunshine that glows through life’s portals, “when stars rise among swallows swinging back and forth on lines of energy above the water. They flash right through my breath.”

Interruption of that energy is fatal to the bees, and ultimately to every living thing. That is what these writers are mourning in their celebration of summers past. Their incantations, a pastiche of concurrent nostalgia, is a spell for summer, words and music Trevor Carolan embraces in “Dance Your Prayers.”

“It was easy to enjoy the feeling in the air; it was gentle like a bowl of Okanagan Peaches.”

This is what the contributors to *The Summer Book* want us to remember and hopefully reconfigure. The landscape has changed. We have changed, but the Socratic conversations Trevor Carolan describes must go on. We must recall civility, gentleness, kindness in a world taken over by greed and the mindless destruction of vulnerable things, fragile ideas and life-giving water. These writers and artists offer up waves, rain, tears, laughter, the cry of a young seagull for its mother, besos, the taste of sunshine on young shoulders, tongues carrying the fragile cargo of berries to satisfy the hunger of our souls. And we will swallow.

Linda Rogers is the author of *Bozuk*, a Turkish memoir and “You Need Me at the River,” from *Cli-Fi*, an anthology of Climate Fiction from Exile.

LANGUAGE OF FAMILY (continued from page 24)

partner faced. For instance, her own sister chose a seldom-seen neighbour to be her daughter’s guardian, saying that “she would never let her daughter be raised by [the author and her partner].” For Findlay today, the situation is better, but it is still not ideal.

Lynn Greenhough’s essay, “A Story of Being Odd and Finding One’s Bashert [Soulmate],” is about her durable marriage to a Jewish-Canadian man (born female). This relationship introduces the author to a welcoming Jewish community in Victoria and spurs on her own conversion to Judaism. There is something affecting about the loving way in which she describes her guy from New York City and the Judaism that eventually becomes central to her identity.

The editor saves Tzu-I Chung’s essay, “Generations,” for last, ending the compilation on a strong note. Chung parallels the histories of two BC clans, the Guichon one mentioned above and the Louie-Seto one, of Chinese ancestry. Both families endure hardship to build successful businesses, with the Louie-Setos eventually flourishing in the grocery trade. In her closing lines, Chung supplies a fitting conclusion to the book:

Canada turns 150 in 2017 and, at this historical juncture, is renowned as one of the few western countries to embrace multiculturalism through policy, referencing it as an important part of Canadian nationhood. No one can claim to know everyone in our Canadian family; we are too large and too diverse. But we celebrate Canada as a place that brings that diversity together and—like all families—is constantly evolving. That is worth celebration.

The Language of Family does not gloss over the hardships that families in BC had to endure—from residential schools for indigenous children to internment camps for Japanese-Canadians—but it shows that family bonds and a sense of belonging go a long way towards helping individuals overcome the difficulties that they face in their everyday lives.

Eric Spalding is of mixed French-Canadian and Scottish ancestry. He grew up in Québec and now lives in British Columbia.

TWO FROM FRONTENAC HOUSE

Candice James

Cemetery *Compost* overturns the tombstones of loss, rebirth, memory, and castigation leaving the reader with an innate feeling of something betrayed and forgotten; sacred and remembered. There is a rich sadness in these poems that defies penury. Age, death, loss and movement toward the ever-elusive point of demise permeate the pages of this collection and leave a paper cut on the reader's mind.

In "Your Enemy's Heart" the surreal takes shape in columns of misty images: "Walls of fire divide the hours / and no one can sort the shapes / that move between them. // Hands break through the disfigured skin / of cities, clutching at clotted, heaving air.

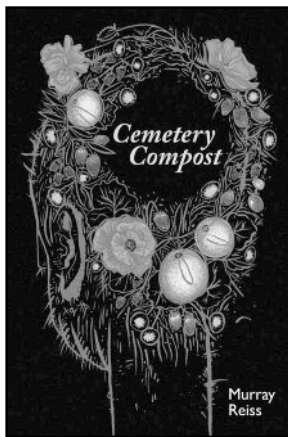
We glimpse life being taken out for a canter and exercised on the racetrack of indecision where we wager and hedge our shaky bets in the poem "Kinder To Forget": We wait with our blinkered horses / while the answers are auctioned off." And in "Mandarin Ghosts" Reiss nicely and oh so succinctly describes an intriguing yet annoying aspect of aging: "Some days I go into town / and everybody looks like somebody else / departed, deceased, or lost'.

Cemetery Compost is a rich mix of style & content and diction & syntax. Many of these poems missed their mark with me, but some were bang on and shattered the bullseye.

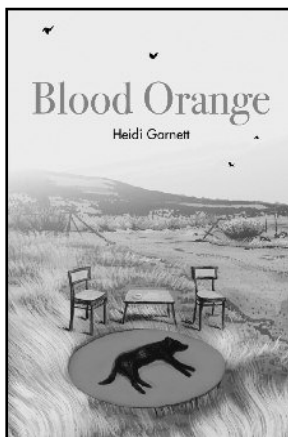
There is a very predominant thread of childhood trauma and growing up in the shadow of the ravages of World War II that weaves its way in and out of the pages of *Blood Orange*; and there is a surreal landscape of imagination and imagery bound into the very fabric of the poems.

The imagery immediately takes charge right from the first poem "Gdansk Redux": Memories are windows hung in the sky, glass panes / You press your face against to see who lives inside. / Is he dead or alive?"

In "The Key" Garnett offers sage advice with perfect poetic aplomb: "Be careful / and live your life as if days are minutes. / Don't count on second chances. Mind what



Cemetery Compost
Murray Reiss
Frontenac House
Poetry
90 pgs, \$15.95



Blood Orange
Heidi Garnett
Frontenac House
Poetry
92 pgs, \$15.95

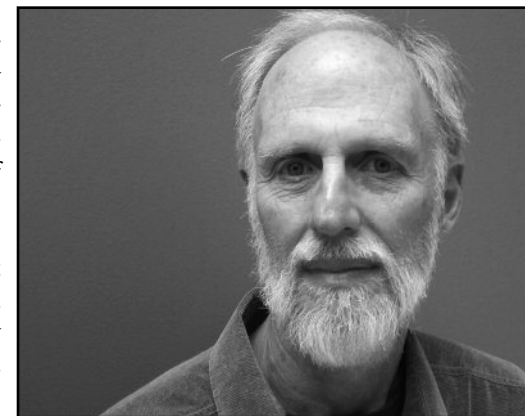
you say. / Words can be little savages / who stick matches between your toes / and light them. Don't play with fire."; and her metaphor for death is such a thing of beauty: "the aroma of death, / emanations of flower petals burned on life's altar."

In her poem "Past Perfect" recalling her father's death, the poet compares life and death; body and spirit to sky and earth as one entity and the last four lines are indeed a succulent dessert for the reader to feast upon: "The moon begins its slow ascent, a lantern / held aloft. Starts clutching rucksacks / to their fiery chests follow close behind. / Sky and earth indivisible now, one seamless garment." And there are some fabulous lines in "The Last Dance": The bone of the river fractured' // our breath braiding into a lovely rope."

"Breath Sounds", a terrific poem, is my favourite of my favourites (too many to choose from). It is the perfect poem to end the book. "I believe the sun / is a rusted clock and my life is built on minutes, / but I'm not afraid." /// "Breath held in abeyance, winter's cold dream begins / to drift awake and ground fog lifts from its damp bed / to taste young forsythia buds with its long fingers. / Sleep is an elbow on which eternity leans."

"Blood Orange" is filed with blatant memories that shock and indelible images that forever underscore the meaning of the word beauty.

Candice James is a poet, musician, visual artist, singer songwriter. She was Poet Laureate of New Westminster, BC for two 3 year terms, 2010-2016. and awarded the title of Poet Laureate Emerita in November 2016 by the City. Her latest book is *The Water Poems* (Ekstasis Editions 2017).



Murray Reiss



Heidi Garnett

INFINITE POWER

Candice James

Janet Vickers' metaphoric coastline, turned awakening crone, in the poem "Lap of the City", is a spectacular surreal inversion of healing and resuscitation to dominion of the beleaguered arm of nature. It is a poem full of hope and anticipation waiting patiently in an arena of deception alive with semi-invisible industrial ghosts.

There are some amazing lines in "Divine Heart"; one of the best is 'Mind and heart connect at the place where / grief is mute.'

The first and last stanzas in "Vespers" are eye/mind opening: 'Who should be left behind when the lifeboat / Can't take us all is the wrong



Janet Vickers

question.' // 'There is a place for unfolding evolution, like a longing, too large to fit in the boat.'

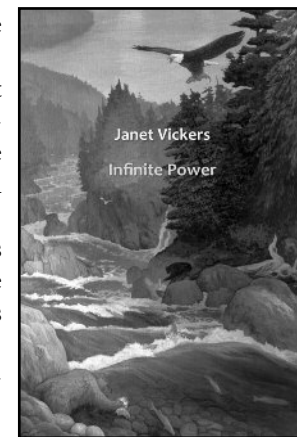
"Out of the Depths (Psalm 130)" is a very brief yet beautiful poem packed with heart, emotion and sentiment: 'I cry to the infinite echo' // 'Let me choose compassion / So that I may hold in my heart / An eternal place for you.'

It is evident throughout these poems that Vickers has a way with words as so succinctly evidenced in the poem "Apology": 'We are thin sticks holding the ocean's waves / in our small hands and our large conceit.'

Vickers has presented the world with the 'PERFECT' poem which is the title poem: "Infinite Power"

You simply MUST buy the book to read this oh so perfect poem; and to whet your appetite, the last line of the poem is 'all the rest is construct'.

If you love poetry, do yourself a favour and find a very special place on your bookshelf for this book.

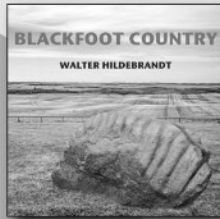


Infinite Power
Janet Vickers
Ekstasis Editions
92 pp. \$23.95

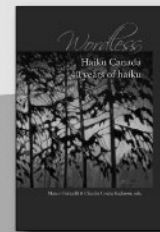
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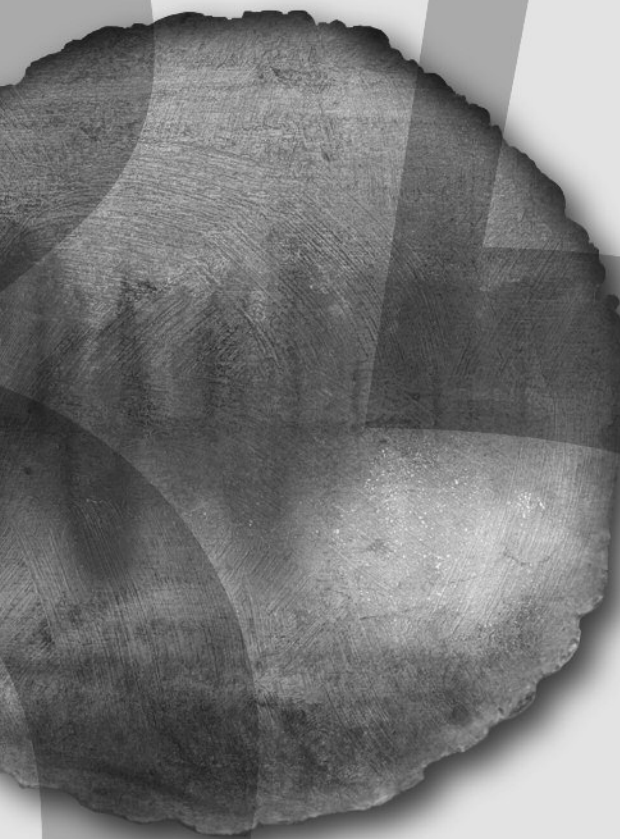
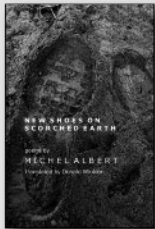
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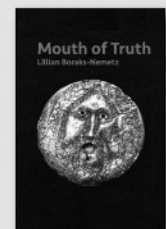
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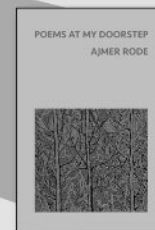
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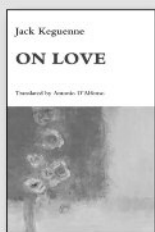
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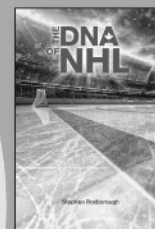


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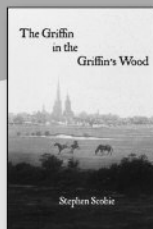
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