

the Pacific Rim Review of Books

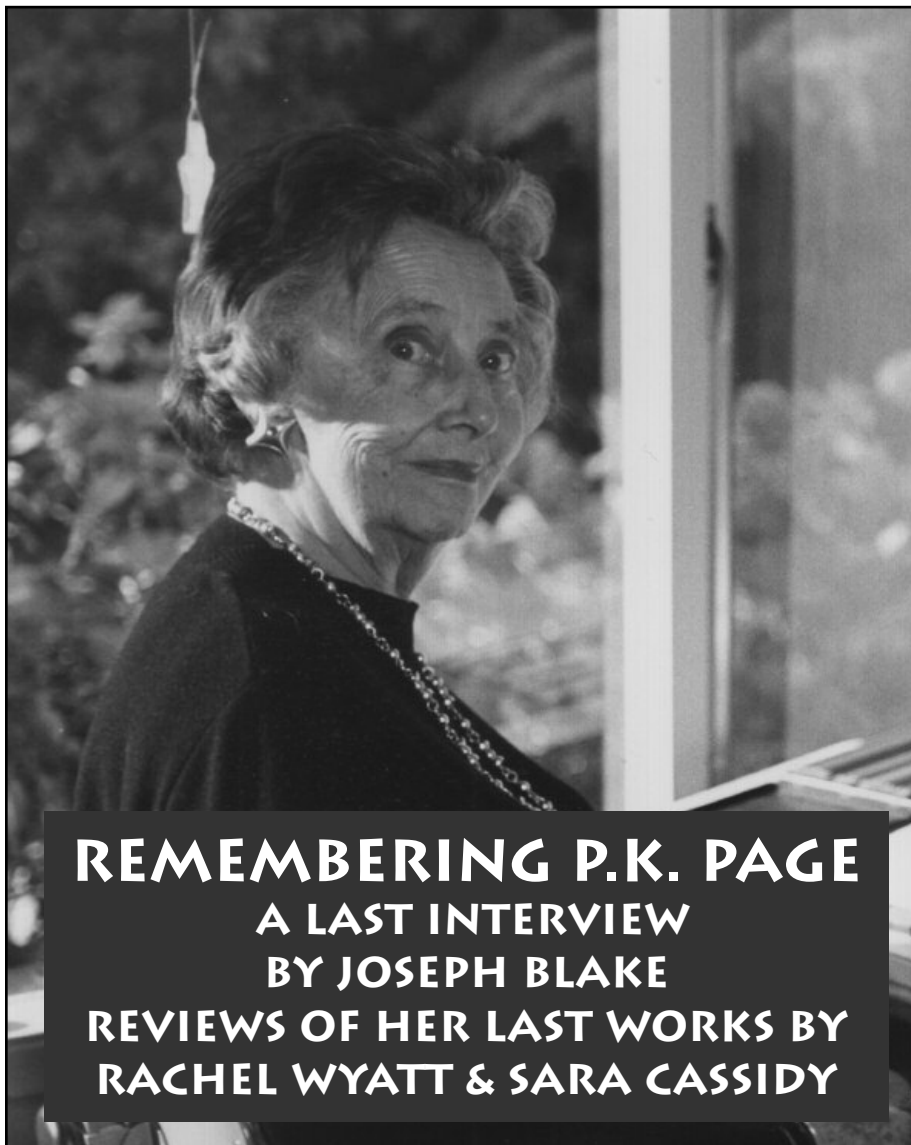
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REMEMBERING P.K. PAGE
A LAST INTERVIEW
BY JOSEPH BLAKE
REVIEWS OF HER LAST WORKS BY
RACHEL WYATT & SARA CASSIDY

P.K. Page. Photo by Barbara Pedrick

CP CAVAFY BY MIKE DOYLE

**ROBERT PHILBIN CONSIDERS
KAPUSCINSKI'S TRAVELS**

**RICHARD WIRICK ON
JOHN UPDIKE**

**ERIC SPALDING ON
NICHOLSON BAKER**

WORLD IN A WINEGLASS
HILARY TURNER VIEWS
NERUDA'S *WORLD'S END*



Pablo Neruda

PETER GRANT ON JACK SPICER

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CONVERSATION WITH PAUL NELSON**

**GARY SNYDER'S RIPRAP AT FIFTY
BY TIM MCNULTY**

**PLUS: CAROL COOPER ON JG BALLARD, RALPH
SALISBURY, VINCENTE ALEIXANDRE, GARY GEDDES,
DON MCKAY AND MUCH MORE**



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PRRB

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This issue of the
Pacific Rim Review of Books
is dedicated to the memory of
Lena Horne (1917-2010).
Jazzsinger, actress, dancer
and political activist.
She will be missed.

Lena Horne
Stormy Weather
bluebird single
first editions reissue



THAT'S THE WAY IT BEGAN

AN INTERVIEW WITH P.K. PAGE AT 92

Joseph Blake

What is perhaps the most distinctive element is her wealth of imagery drawn from wide and varied sources, sharp and startling with the force of the personality they reveal.
Alan Crawley on PK Page's 1946 debut poetry book, *As Ten As Twenty*

This past summer, the acclaimed late-poet and painter PK Page at 92 welcomed interviewer Joseph Blake to her Uplands home in the Victoria area's Oak Bay. Greeted at the door by Page's home care worker and tiny, white guard dog, Blake climbed the stairs to her living room, where the poet, dressed elegantly and as beautiful as ever, sat in a hard-backed chair ready for a one and a half hour recorded interview conversation, most of which follows. Her reminiscences were occasionally punctuated with chuckles, grimaces and laughter. Among other subjects, Page describes her earliest memories of the writing scene in BC. We believe this is the last major interview that P.K. gave. Many thanks to UFV Press/Anvil Press for permission to excerpt from *Making Waves*, a new anthology of critical commentary on B.C. and Pacific Northwest literature, Trevor Carolan, ed., 2010.

JB: Can we begin by asking you to share your earliest memories of the writing scene in B.C.?

PKP: I came out here in the 1940s, during the war. But before that I met Anne Marriott, and she was a poet in Victoria who wrote a very fine, long poem, "The Wind Our Enemy," about the drought in Saskatchewan. I met her in Quebec at a conference, and she said there was someone here by the name of Alan Crawley, and that Alan, inspired by Dorothy Livesay, Doris Ferne, Anne Marriott herself, and Floris Clark McLaren were urging Alan to edit a poetry magazine.

Now, you've got to remember in those days there was no Canada Council, no granting bodies for writers, no magazines that published poetry. *Saturday Night* occasionally published a poem as filler, and my husband [Arthur Irwin]¹ (who was not my husband then), did commission E.J. Pratt to write a long poem about Dunkirk for *Macleans*, but normally nobody published poetry. Oh, *Canadian Forum* published poems, but a poetry magazine simply didn't exist in the country when Alan began this magazine, *Contemporary Verse*. We had no magazines and no funding bodies, and there were a lot of us beginning to write and wanting to publish. So these four women persuaded Alan, (who incidentally was blind) to undertake the editing of a magazine that was called *Contemporary Verse*.

Alan was blind. Everything had to be read to him. He had been a very successful lawyer in Winnipeg who had a very rare germ attack the optic nerve, and he went blind when he was in his forties. He always loved poetry. He always loved theatre and poetry, and he used to go every year to England. He used to go to poetry readings in London, and he was used to poetry through the ear. When he had eyesight, he read a lot.

They persuaded Alan to bring out *Contemporary Verse*. Anne Marriott told me it was coming out, and she said, "Why don't you send him some work?" and I did. In fact, I had two or three or four poems in the first issue of CV.

Dorothy Livesay was a great supporter of the magazine and of Alan. Floris McLaren took on the business management of it. She also wrote poetry, published a book called *Frozen Fire*, I think. To the best of my knowledge, that's the way poetry began on the West Coast in Canada.

Because there wasn't another poetry magazine, Alan drew from all over Canada. First issue was 1941. He stopped finally after more than a decade, 39 issues. He published everyone in Canada—Earle Birney, A.J.M. Smith, F.R. Scott, Jay MacPherson, Anne Wilkinson, Louis Dudek: anybody who ever amounted to anything and a lot of people who didn't.

JB: What Alan Crawley like to work with?

PKP: He was very frank with his criticism if you sent him work that he didn't like...and it was difficult, because he had to use a Braille typewriter. Sometimes the messages you could hardly make heads or tail of—but they were always worth struggling with, because he was so honest with you, and he had a good ear.

Now, a little bit later, in Montreal, *Preview* was started, and I was one of the



P.K. Page

Preview people. My father had died and I brought my mother out to Victoria to settle her down, but where I really was working was in Montreal, and there they started a magazine called *Preview*. It has nothing to do with the West Coast, except there was a sort of germination going on. The West Coast began it and Montreal next, not Toronto. It was the West Coast and then Montreal, which is very interesting.

JB: When you moved out here in the 1960s, was there much of a writing community in Victoria?

PKP: Well, Skelton owned it, and he wouldn't have anything to do with me. He excluded me. I was not part of anything. He taught at University of Victoria, and he had Susan Musgrave and Marilyn Bowering and all these young writers. He knew a great deal about poetry, Skelton, a very great deal, [icily] very informed.

He and another professor at UVic [John Peters] started the *Malahat Review*. The two of them were joint editors, I think. In the beginning he didn't publish any Canadians. I got into a terrible public fight with him about it.

Alan Crawley had letters from all of us. He had an enormous body of correspondence from all the writers in Canada who he had written to. He was broke, Alan, in his old age, terribly broke, and he lived in a terrible little shack on Lee Avenue. Somebody suggested to him that he sell his letters to some university, and he offered them to UVic and Skelton turned them down. He said there was nothing there of any interest. And he was buying letters from European writers. Alan finally sold them to Kingston, to Queens I think. He sold them somewhere, but Alan was absolutely dashed when this trove of letters was rejected. Academia [grimacing] is probably one of the *bitchiest* areas in the world.

Today, this very day, there's a Page-Irwin Colloquium Room being opened at Trent. They asked for some paintings, and I gave them some of my paintings, and Zailig Pollock, a professor there is doing my collected works, both on the Web and in print. University of Toronto is going to publish them all. They have been so generous to me. I can't tell you how generous they've been to me. It isn't always that academia is bitchy; I think there's something weird about UVic.

JB: I've always felt excluded from it as well, and I remember Victoria-based, jazz great Paul Horn telling me he always felt excluded from it too...

PKP: Me too. I was excluded from it, quite actively. They really had very little interest in me, and I don't care. It doesn't bother me. I get more attention than I deserve already. So it isn't a problem for me, but it is curious.

JB: How about the writing community or the artistic—the painting community? Were you part of that?

PKP: Oh, I was excluded from the artistic community too.

JB: By the painters?

PKP: Yes, the Limners. They had everybody in town, photographers, anyone you can think of, but not me.

JB: Did the Limners include writers, poets?

PKP: Well, they had Skelton. He did little collages of some kind. No, I'm very happy here now. I've got good friends, but the first years here I felt excluded from every-

thing. I was! I didn't merely feel it, I was!

JB: *What about Ivy's Bookshop? Wasn't there a salon-like reading scene there?*

PKP: Ivy (Mickleson) was wonderful, as you know. Oh, Ivy was wonderful! A genius in her own way, knew about books; knew about how to run a bookshop, knew about how to have contact with her customers. She'd quickly glom-on to your taste in literature, and if she saw anything she thought was of interest to you she'd phone you up and say, "I don't know if this would be of interest to you, but the next pass-by you might want to look at..." She started doing readings, which were quite interesting, fistfights and all kinds of excitement. I wasn't involved in the fistfights, but I did a lot of readings...

She was a wonder, a remarkable little being. Integrity, the two of them, Aida and Ivy. Aida doing the bookkeeping, and Ivy doing the books. They were a fine team, but Ivy was a character.

JB: *This is a little off-topic but Ivy once took my wife and I under her wing, adopted us really. Friday afternoons we'd spend drinking gin and tonic and discussing politics and books at her beach shack on Gonzales Bay. She didn't know why my wife and I wanted another child, but when our daughter Emma was born, she became the baby's doting grandmother.*

PKP: She didn't understand marriage either. Her mother had told her "Only marry if you're desperate." There was nothing material about Ivy. She didn't want material possessions, on another plane altogether, extraordinary. She was the most loyal friend to me. There was nobody like Ivy.

JB: *Emily Carr is another famous Victoria character. Was Carr or her work an influence on you?*

PKP: No. No. She was alive when I first came to Victoria, but I never met her, and I don't think I'd seen any of her work then. There wasn't an art gallery when I came here first. So there wouldn't be anywhere to hang them even if anyone had the wit to recognize that they were good.

JB: *Were you painting then?*

PKP: I didn't start painting until Brazil. I couldn't write in Brazil, and I started painting. I was studying Portuguese very hard. I had given up smoking, and I associated smoking with writing, and I was not hearing much English, and my language seemed to dry up, and I started drawing. I remember a very famous Israeli painter, Arie Aroch who said to me in Brazil, "Why do you give up an art form that you have mastered to start work in an art form where you don't even know there's more than one [shade

of] white in the world? You know nothing." And I said, "I didn't give up writing, it gave me up." He replied, "I think you're making a mistake" So I said, "Arie, come see my work one day, would you, and then talk to me." And he came, and he said, "I take it all back." He said "You begin like a pro."

JB: *You achieved international recognition as a writer from Canada. Wasn't one of your early poems included in Treasury of Modern Poetry for Scribner's in New York?*

PKP: I don't know it.

JB: *Oscar Williams included it in the collection ...*

PKP: Oh yes, I was in that. I was being published quite early in *Poetry* too, which was the Chicago magazine, THE poetry magazine really, still exists. I've got a poem coming out in their next issue, I think. I won one of their prizes in the '40s. I've had a lot of breaks. That's the only way I can tell it.

JB: *Would you consider the opportunity to travel "one of the breaks"?*

PKP: That was certainly a break. I've had a lot of breaks. I've had good men in my life. I haven't been subjected to some of the awful things that some women have either through their fathers or their lovers. I haven't had all the travels I would like to have, but I've had very interesting travels.

JB: *Do you think your travel has been much of an influence on your work?*

PKP: I don't know...I don't know. It's very hard to know what influences you. I don't like the word "influence". I think the word "affinity" is much better than influence.

JB: *What about painting and writing? I don't want to say do they influence each other, but do they live in the same realm?*

PKP: Well, I don't know. When I was painting I wasn't writing and when I was writing I wasn't painting. It wasn't deliberate. I just get totally absorbed in the one thing, and it didn't leave me time or room for anything else.

JB: *Were there painters in Victoria who you associated with?*

PKP: Do you mean in the '40s?

JB: *No, when you were painting.*

PKP: Pat Bates. She and I, both of us, felt ignored by the local community. Pat was finally accepted, and I suppose I was finally accepted too. Pat was really the only artist I knew.

JB: *Was there any relationship with musicians like the Adaskins?*

PKP: Harry Adaskin was in Vancouver. Harry loved poetry and used to read poetry at the Vancouver Public Library. I was vaguely in touch with him, because he used to

(continued on page 13)



Though sickness and death take their terrible toll
and they did and they do – one's astonishing heart
almost sings through its grief like a bird – water bird –
in the wind and the waves of some vast salty sea.
Explain it? I can't. But it's true I'm in love
with some point beyond sight, with some singular star
for which words won't suffice, which reduce it, in fact.
Head on it's invisible, if I should look
with my cones, not my rods, it would vanish – expunged;
if I glance to the side, through my rods, then the star
shines as brightly as Venus. Which truth is *the* Truth?

– from *Hand Luggage, A Memoir in Verse*

by P.K. Page, 2006

In Memoriam, P.K. Page

November 23, 1916 – January 14, 2010

TRAVELS WITH KAPUSCINSKI

THE GLOBAL HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Robert Philbin

We are, all of us, pilgrims who struggle along different paths toward the same destination.
Antoine De Saint-Exupéry

The quote from French writer and aviator Saint-Exupéry, which appears in Ryszard Kapuscinski's last work, *Travels With Herodotus*, sums up the Polish journalist's starkly democratic world view, despite — one might almost say — his formal central European orientation and charm. He survived the Nazi and Soviet occupations of his homeland, suffered tragedy and hardship, but human beings remained somehow essentially equal in Kapuscinski's empathetically observant eyes. Whether the Shah of Iran or a hired driver in Luanda, each individual has a story, a physical presence; each a weakness, a saving grace, which makes reading Kapuscinski an experience much more than journalism, more than history even, his work becomes a lesson in the Humanities.

His was a life well-lived by most measures. He came to know Patrice Lumumba in the Congo, Che Guevara in Cuba, Ben Bella in Algeria, and even Idi Amin in Uganda. He covered the bloody uprising on Zanzibar in 1964 and the war between El Salvador and Honduras in 1970. He was in southern Angola in 1975 when South African forces invaded. [2] Kapuscinski reported the collapse of Portuguese colonialism in west Africa, the fall of the infamous American client-dictator in Iran — witnessing authoritative regimes deconstructing while discovering something oddly new rising from the debris — but his narratives were driven by living among the poor and talking to the anonymous. Kapuscinski's readers journey through momentous events with a narrator whose fundamental point of view is intuitively empathetic to the underclasses, a trait of character which often transforms the journalist into the artist and myth maker.

Much like Herodotus, his classic mentor, Kapuscinski was a wanderer with a psychological impulse for "crossing the border" into whatever experience circumstance delivered next in his life. He was a skilled writer, capable of capturing the ephemeral existential moment, the timeless experience, in simple passages which absorb common detail into crisp language, like this typically Kapuscinskian observation recorded in mid-1960's India:

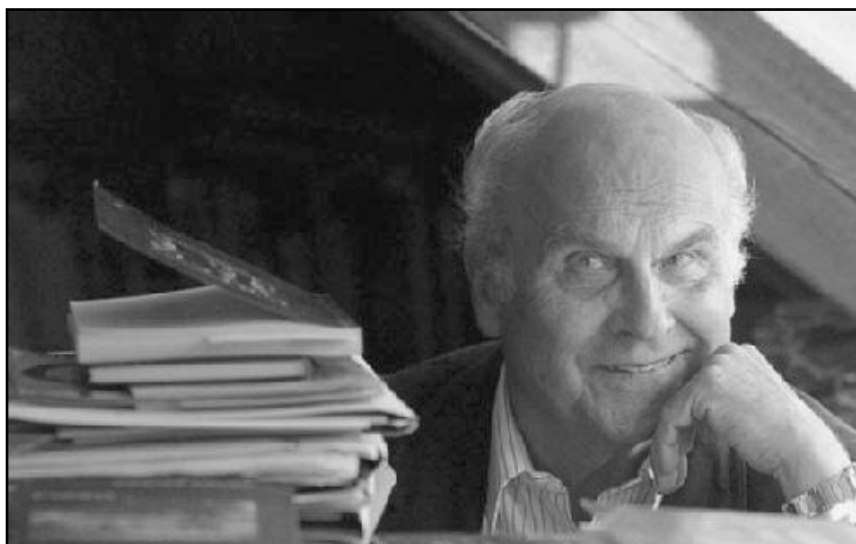
Beside the Ganges, which at this point is wide, expansive, and lazy, stretch rows of wooden pyres, on which are burning dozens, hundreds of corpses. The curious can for several rupees take a boat over to this gigantic open-air crematorium. Half naked, soot-covered men bustle about here, as do many young boys. With long poles they adjust the pyres to direct a better draft so the cremation can proceed faster; the line of corpses had no end, the wait is long. The gravediggers rake the still glowing ashes and push them into the river. The gray dust floats atop the waves for a while but very soon, saturated with water, it sinks and vanishes. [Travels With Herodotus, p 25]

The reporter is so present in the moment here, so existentially aware, that he all but disappears; and as with any good cinema, his reader is effortlessly delivered into the experience, made more participant than observer, by his insight and craft.

Kapuscinski traveled the world from the late 1950s to the 1980s as foreign correspondent for the Polish Press Agency and his uncanny ability to land in the right place at the propitious moment exposed him to major historic events in the last half of the twentieth century. He was there as a child when in 1939 the first Soviet troops entered his small town in northeastern Poland and he was there fifty years later when the

Soviet Union disintegrated. In his book *Imperium* we get a glimpse of that childhood, following a visit to his home by Soviet soldiers:

Since the time of our house search, Mother does not let us take our clothes off at night. We can take off our shoes, but we have to have them beside us all the time. The coats lie on chairs, so they can be put on in the wink of an eye. In principle we are not permitted to sleep. My sister and I lie side by side, and we poke each other, shake each other, or pull each other by the hair. "Hey, you, don't sleep!" But, of course, in the middle of this struggling and shoving we both fall asleep. But Mother really does not sleep. She sits at the table and listens the whole time. The silence on our street rings in our ears. If someone's footsteps echo in this silence, Mother grows pale. A man at this hour is an enemy. In class we read in Stalin about enemies. An enemy is a terrifying figure. Who else would come around at this hour? Good people are afraid; they are sitting hidden in their homes. [Imperium, p 12]



Ryszard Kapuscinski (pronounced ka-poos-CHIN-ski) spent some four decades observing and writing about conflict throughout the developing world. He witnessed 27 coups and revolutions. The son of schoolteachers, he was born in Pinsk, a city now in Belarus, which he remembered as a polyglot city of Jews, Poles, Russians, Belarussians, Ukrainians and Armenians, all of whom were called Poleshuks. "They were a people without a nation and without, therefore, a national identity," he said. That quality, some say, along with the poverty of Pinsk, inspired his empathy for the third world. (NY Times, [1])

among the dignitaries and wipe the urine from their shoes with a satin cloth. This was my job for ten years. [The Emperor, p 5]

Kapuscinski even begged his way from the comforts of Lisbon to the jungles of Angola, risking his life repeatedly to cover the common brutalities of civil war as Portuguese colonists literally dismantled their existence in a mad rush to abandon Luanda. Here's how he described that experience in 1976:

All they wanted was to get out with their lives and to take their possessions with them. Everybody was busy building crates. Mountains of boards and plywood were brought in. The price of hammers and nails soared. Crates were the main topic of conversation — how to build them, what was the best thing to reinforce them with. Self-proclaimed experts, crate specialists, homegrown architects of craters, masters of crate styles, crate schools, and crate fashions appeared. [Another Day of Life, p 14]

And when the crates were filled with "whole salons and bedrooms, sofas, tables, chairs, pictures, carpets, chandeliers, porcelain, bedclothes and linen, even artificial flowers, all the monstrous and inexhaustible junk that clutters every middle-class home," they were moved neighborhood by neighborhood through the ancient city streets and down to the docks, the wooden city leaving abandoned and lifeless the

stone city which suddenly, “magically transformed into a museum exhibit of an ancient Eastern city and the last tour group had left.”

Portuguese Luanda, in Kapuscinski’s pristine narrative, became a expansive wooden-crated flotilla, which sailed away on the ocean and, after several hours, “it disappeared below the horizon.” But Kapuscinski was not on the boats with the Portuguese and their cargo of possessions, he was not enjoying the immense and blessed self-satisfaction that visits the merely lucky who have escaped the threat of danger. He was on the beach with the Angolans.

At that hour it was foggy and cold. I stood on the shore with some Angolan soldiers and a little crowd of ragtag freezing black children. “They’ve taken everything from us,” one of the soldiers said without malice, and turned to cut a pineapple because that fruit, so overripe that, when it was cut, the juice ran out like water from a cup, was then our only food. He buried his face in the golden bowl of the fruit. The homeless harbor children gazed at him with greedy, fascinated eyes. The soldier lifted his juice-smeared face, smiled and added, “But anyway, we’ve got a home now. They left us what’s ours.” [Another Day of Life, p 18]

Sometime later, after Kapuscinski had left Luanda, he was driving with a friend along the docks at the mouth of the Tagus river back in Lisbon, “and there I saw the fantastic heaps of crates stacked to perilous heights,” he reported. “Unmoved, abandoned, as if they belonged to no one. This was the largest section of the wooden Luanda, which had sailed to the coast of Europe.” The dregs of centuries of slave-trading, resource-pillaging colonialism simply floats away, a cargo of junk ultimately abandoned on distant docks, a mere footnote to the larger history of the times, perhaps, but Kapuscinski was there, witnessing the passing of time, recording and explicating its human meaning, both for his contemporary readers and those many more certain to follow in the future.

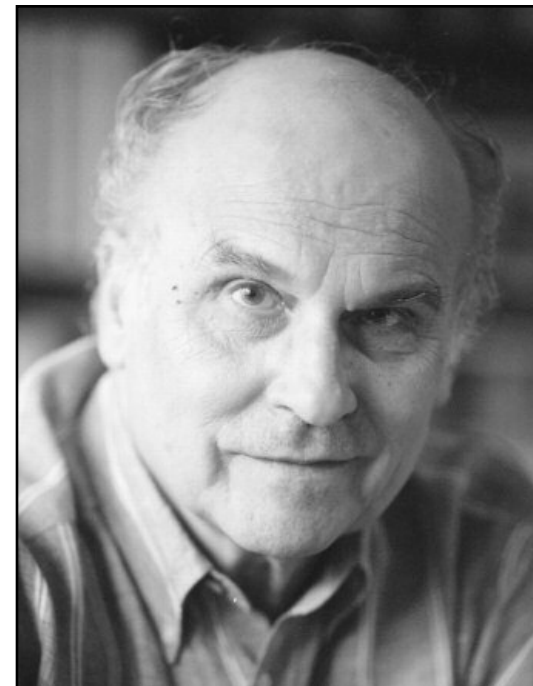
2.

Travels With Herodotus, Kapuscinski’s last published work following his death in 2007 at age 74, is in many ways *raison d’être* for his life, illuminating the historical context for his experiences and writing. He, like Herodotus centuries ago, was an obsessive and observant wanderer, a collector of stories, anxious to find the next adventure unfolding in the next political hot spot, realizing later perhaps that there might be an historic arch to his travels.

Kapuscinski understood his times from both the perspective of classic Mediterranean cultural, and the post-modern intellectual critique of cultural injustice and political upheavals that generated social and democratic progress throughout the twentieth century. Herodotus, who came from what is today Turkey, 2,500 years ago, understood the sweeping cultural conflicts and many wars between Greek and Persian civilizations would ultimately determine the future of “the known world,” just as Kapuscinski understood that the great global conflicts of wealth and poverty, economic, political and religious ideology would come to dominate the cultural wars in this century. Here’s Kapuscinski exploring a core issue of the day writing about Algiers in 1965:

In the small space of this beautiful but congested city intersected two great conflicts of the contemporary world. The first was the one between Christianity and Islam (expressed here in the clash between colonizing France and colonized Algeria). The second, which acquired as sharpness of focus immediately after the independence and departure of the French, was a conflict at the very heart of Islam, between its open, dialectical — I would venture to say “Mediterranean” — current and its other, more inward-looking one, born of a sense of uncertainty and confusion vis-a-vis the contemporary world, guided by fundamentalists who take advantage of modern technology and organizational principles yet at the same time deem the defense of faith and custom against modernity as the condition of their own existence, their sole identity. [Travels With Herodotus, p 226]

But Kapuscinski explicates, he empathetically digs deeper into his subject to discover its existential sources, which opens the reader’s mind to the possibility of understanding issues too easily dismissed by political rhetoric.



Ryszard Kapuscinski

In Algiers one speaks simply of the existence of two varieties of Islam — one, which is called Islam of the desert, and a second, which is defined as the Islam of the river (or the sea). The first is the religion practiced by warlike nomadic tribes struggling to survive in one of the world’s most hostile environments, the Sahara. The second Islam is the faith of merchants, itinerant peddlers, people of the road and of the bazaar, for whom openness, compromise and exchange are not only beneficial to trade but necessary to life itself. [Travels With Herodotus, p 227]

Once an idealistic communist, then a committed Polish labor party socialist, Kapuscinski is not without his critics, political and otherwise. [3] There are those who claim he fabricated interviews, made up details and that he cannot be read with credulity, as if any professional historian ever gets anything perfectly correct, given the natural bias of the subjective mind at work. With time’s perspective it’s easy to see how Herodotus got it completely wrong throughout his Histories and no critical reader would accept Kapuscinski’s translations of interviews in languages he didn’t even speak, nor trust his memory of specific events written about several years later. Of course he was aware of subjectivity’s flaw:

Every human being has his own particular web of associations for identifying and interpreting reality, which, most often instinctively and unthinkingly, he superimposes upon every set of circumstances. Frequently, however, those external circumstances do not conform with, or fit, the structure of our webs, and then we can misread the unfamiliar reality, and interpret its elements incorrectly. On such occasions, we move about in an unreal world, a landscape of dead ends and misleading signs. [Travels With Herodotus, p 142]

Like Herodotus, he was a traveling reporter who wandered the “known world” and kept a record of what he saw and thought; and, as with Herodotus, the reader doesn’t expect finished “history” in the professional sense. Kapuscinski didn’t document the fall of the Shah of Iran, he witnessed it at the street level and recorded it in the “shimmering prose” of a fundamentally decent man, and that is all in the end we expect from him. We accept his well written narrative, as we do a daily newspaper story, understanding that time may well correct the inaccuracies and subjective bias computed in the reporting no matter how timely and dramatic the narrative:

In Herodotus’s days, the Greek word “history” meant something more like “investigation” or “inquiry,” and either of those terms would have been better suited to the author’s intentions and ambitions. He did not, after all, spend his time sitting in archives, and did not produce an academic text, as scholars for centuries after him did, but strove to find out, learn, and portray how history comes into being every day, how people create it, why its course often runs contrary to their efforts and expectations. Are the gods responsible for this, or is man, as a consequences of his flaws and limitations, unable to shape his own destiny wisely and rationally? [Travels With Herodotus, p 257]

(continued on page 37)

THE PROCRASTINATING POET

Eric Spalding

Paul Chowder, the narrator of *The Anthologist*, is a poet. He is modest about his abilities: "I've made some acceptable poems – poems that have been accepted in a literal sense. But not one single really good poem." (p. 23) He is editing a poetry anthology for which he has to write the introduction. Unfortunately, he cannot bring himself to write it. His girlfriend of eight years, exasperated by his procrastinating, has left him. His sad predicament leads Chowder to conclude, "My life is a lie. My career is a joke. I'm a study in failure." (p. 2)

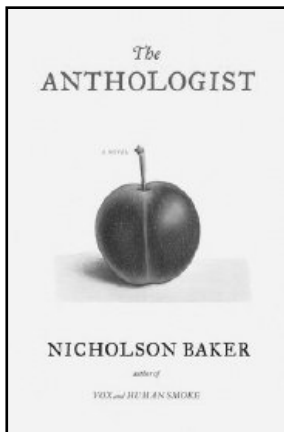
Given this situation, the reader might expect this novel to be depressing. In reality, it is often very funny. Many of Baker's books, including three of my favourites, *The Mezzanine*, *Room Temperature* and *A Box of Matches*, feature a solitary neurotic musing obsessively about matters that the average person would not think to set down in writing. This focus on trivia is sometimes so drawn out that, as a reader, you cannot help but laugh. *The Anthologist* is no different from my favourite Baker novels. For instance, instead of writing his introduction, Chowder engages in "eyelid wars" (rolling his eyeballs around with his eyes closed to see what happens) and contemplates an inchworm crawling on his pants.

But there is also a more serious side to the book. In its literary focus, the novel most closely resembles *U & I*, in which Baker reflected at length on what author John Updike meant to him. During the writing of *U & I*, Baker refrained from reading a single line of Updike's work, because he felt that doing so would distort his true impressions of the author. Through this unusual approach, *U & I* set itself apart from a conventional scholarly inquiry into an author's life and work. Indeed, Baker's book on Updike seemed so awkwardly improvised that, as a reader, you weren't immediately aware of how much you were learning about how writers influence readers.

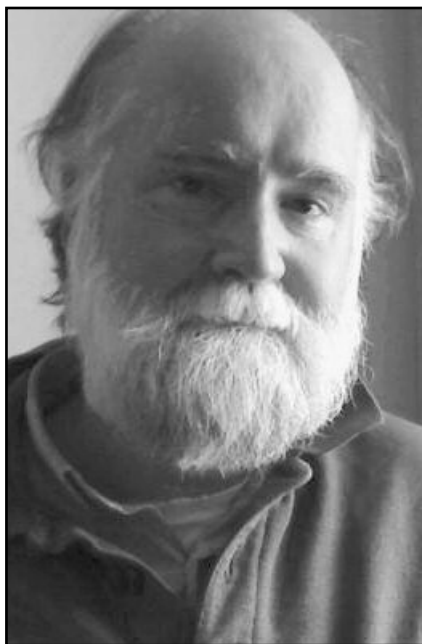
Baker uses a similar approach in *The Anthologist*. In not actually writing the introduction, Chowder relieves himself of the burden of being an expert. The book's style, in its apparent spontaneity, reinforces this distance from an academic treatise. For instance, about the introduction, Chowder thinks to himself, "You can't force it. If it isn't there you can't force it. Then I thought: You can force it. My whole life I've been forcing it." (p. 98) Chowder, moreover, describes himself as someone whose interest in poetry waxes and wanes: "I've had, I would say, four major phases in my life where I've been genuinely interested in poetry – interested in reading it, as opposed to writing it" (p. 40). In effect, Chowder is saying, "I'm not an Ivy League English professor with a Ph.D. so don't expect scholarly rigour from me." So what we get in *The Anthologist* is a curious amateur's perspective rather than an academic's. In a way, as a reader, you procrastinate along with Chowder, as you never feel that you're doing the work of delving into complex themes and ideas. Yet in spite of yourself, you wind up learning something about iambic pentameter, enjambments, anapests, and the like.

Nicholson Baker's own background as a musician encourages him to emphasize how musical poetry can be. He even writes melodies for a few admired poems, including "Roman Fountain" by Louise Bogan, "The Day Is Done" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe. Baker's narrator does not dislike free verse, but he wants it to be in the minority, and applauds what he perceives as a renewed emphasis on rhyme and meter in contemporary poems.

In spite of what he says about his "four major phases" of interest, Chowder is at heart very enthusiastic about poetry. He explores favourites like Mary Oliver and W.S.



The Anthologist
Nicholson Baker
Simon & Schuster
(2009), 245 pages



Nicholson Baker

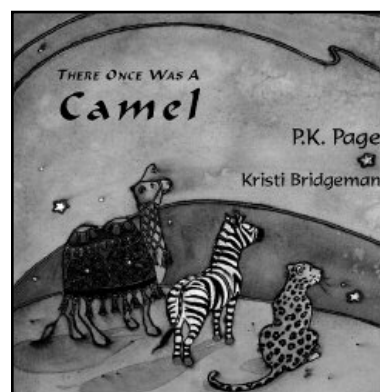


The corner of Nicholson and Baker in Surrey, BC. Photo by Emma Salja.

Merwin, and provides gossip details about a few poets' lives (the depressives, the adulterers, the suicides ...). A poetry aficionado might find some of his observations banal or shopworn, but the effect on me was to increase my appreciation for what poets do.

As for the ending, it does what an ending should do: it's affecting, it follows logically from the preceding chapters and it gives the reader the sense that the story is complete. Nicholson Baker has had his missteps – in my opinion, his preceding book, *Human Smoke*, was one of them – but with *The Anthologist* he renews my fascination for his writing. Indeed, I don't know of any other writer with such a quirky and obsessive sensibility. For someone who has not read Baker before, *The Anthologist* is an absorbing introduction to his style.

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



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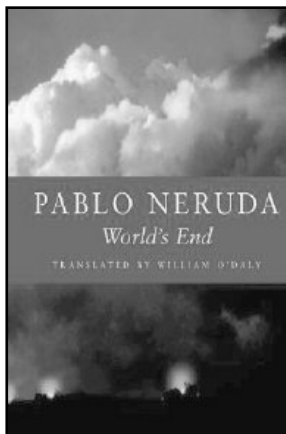
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THE WORLD IN A WINEGLASS

Hilary Turner

How would this strike you as an epitaph for the twentieth century: “The truth is there is no truth”? Unlike the “all Cretans are liars” paradox, the statement is disarming, the two clauses not so much cancelling each other out as gently and cooperatively dismantling the notion that a statement, any statement, can be final, summative, or compelling. From a poet whose extensive *oeuvre* has described, celebrated, and condemned the era that you and I continue to inhabit, it is the last word in humility. It is to say, What I have written, I have written—take it or leave it:

*The truth is there is no truth.
But I move forward singing
my song, and the roads tell me
of the many they have seen pass
in this century of people without a country.
 (“Exile” 284-5)*



World's End
Pablo Neruda
William O'Daly, trans.
(Copper Canyon)

Neruda is probably not the most humble of poets. In some guises, in this volume and elsewhere, he offers to speak for Chile (his country), for communism (his allegiance), and for all of humanity (his abiding love). Nevertheless, his rootedness and his confessed fallibility make him a credible spokesman for almost anything he chooses to present to the sympathetic reader. I came away from this collection, one of the last to be published in his lifetime (and only just now available in its entirety in an English translation) seared, disturbed, and full of faith.

The subject of the book is the twentieth century. Born in 1904, Neruda got his political baptism by fire during the Spanish Civil War. In his later years, he was incandescent with rage at the war in Vietnam. In between, he assessed Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Salazar, Nixon, and many others in positions of great power but dubious authority. He embraced Ché Guevara, Fidel Castro, and Salvador Allende as brothers. In late September, 1973, Neruda died—even as Augusto Pinochet was massacring thousands of his Chilean comrades. Reportedly, in his medicated final hours, he muttered “they’re shooting them, they’re killing them” (Teitelboim 469). Neruda’s perspective on this “ceaseless century,” this “bloody and circular century” is thus informed by immediate experience and deep commitment.

Accomplished as he is, with seven previous works of Neruda to his credit, translator William O'Daly must have hesitated over the title of this collection. The Spanish *fin de mundo* could quite naturally have been rendered “the end of the world,” and indeed Neruda makes frequent use throughout the volume of the imagery of Apocalypse. On the other hand, in opting for the more benign “world’s end,” O'Daly introduces a necessary ambiguity. An “end” can be a limit or boundary as well as a conclusion. The reader is thus invited to think both spatially and temporally, “glimpsing,” as John Felstiner has put it in his critical work on Neruda, “now the form and now the flux of things” (73).

The overall arrangement of the 113 poems in the book (with Spanish and English on facing pages) overtly stresses the contiguity of space and time. A prologue titled “The Door” speaks of the potential with which the century opened, and the disillusionment in which each of its apparent innovations has culminated:

*it dawned with light and in the night was blood:
it rained in the morning, by afternoon it cried. (3)*



Pablo Neruda



Neruda in Capri

The speaker takes up a stance “at the gateway”—but in preparing to depart, he offers welcome and companionship to those “who arrive at this festival’s end/at this world’s end” (9). The final poems of the volume are marked just as deliberately by the intersection of time with space. With the benchmark date of 1970 approaching, Neruda anticipates “thirty years of dusk/to come” in which, nevertheless, “something must sprout, /grow, beat among us” (297). And even as his own life ebbs with the century, a cycle of departure and arrival continues to bind individual experience to the pulsations of history:

*I died with every death,
so was able to live again
bound by my testimony
and by my unyielding hope. (299)*

The last poem of all consists of a single line: “Earth, I kiss you, and say goodbye” (301).

Between the boundaries of birth and death, the speaker lingers in the doorway, remembering, recreating, and to some extent analyzing the vicissitudes he has witnessed. Scarcely any politically decisive event escapes his notice. Among many conflicts and atrocities, he speaks of the Holocaust (“Once Again,” “The Ashes”), the struggle for Algerian independence (“The Missing”), the Cuban revolution (“In Cuba”), the Soviet retaliation against the Prague Spring (“1968”), the Tet offensive in Vietnam under the “bloodied hands” of Westmoreland (“The Light”), and the violent means by which former colonies such as Ceylon, Java, and Congo wrenched their independence from Europe, a period when “those who already knew how to die quickly learned how to kill” (“Colonizing”).

Names, dates, places, and events notwithstanding, *World's End* is far from a stark chronology of geopolitical upheavals. Nor is it a memoir, a work that Neruda was to reserve for posthumous publication, and that makes interesting reading alongside this collection. Rather, *World's End* rises above the merely reportorial by virtue of the poet’s capacity to internalize the materials of history, making them into living forms

in his own interior space. He does not stand passively by, does not merely observe, but possesses and rearranges the patterns according to the contours of his own psyche. Like Whitman, who was his primary artistic mentor, Neruda's poetic persona is vast and contains multitudes.

The almost alchemical process by which this internal refashioning of history takes place is difficult to describe in prose. Felstiner refers to it as "dynamic form" (60). At times it resembles an effortful mining of the unconscious mind for the materials it has accrued:

*I managed to take possession
of the treasures of my substrata
and equipped with hereditary
tools, unfathomable,
I first constructed a gust
and then a flight of fireflies.
...
After illustrious attempts
I unleashed a meteor
made from the ruins
of the cellar of my birth. ("Maker of Stars")*

At other times, the transmutation seems surreal and dreamlike, an almost unwilling cooperation with external forces:

*I opened my box of fright
that I carried on those seas
and taking out an exquisite egg
rectangular and tricolored,
I blew with frenzied madness,
until it was born,
the delirium
that walks in the forest. ("Bestiary II")*

Yet in all cases, the poet is a maker, even a craftsman, whom Neruda characterizes as one who has not "discovered anything," for "everything was already discovered" (123), yet who is closest in spirit to the carpenter, the baker, and the ironmonger. In his endless search for the materials of his craft, he is also of the tribe of the fishermen, who tell him

*we fish for fish
and you fish inside yourself
and later return to fish for yourself
and throw yourself back into the sea. ("I Always")*

The recursive nature of this process is most clearly shown in "Metamorphosis," to my mind the most important poem in the collection. Here the same hapless but knowing speaker is stretched out against the unforgiving rack of time. His experience is almost wholly subjective, even solipsistic. He has "taken a kick/from time" and nothing is going the way he wants:

*My papers were lost,
receipts could not be found,
the garbage cans were filled
with the names of contributors,
with addresses of lawyers
and numbers of beautiful women. (103)*

History seems to be riding roughshod over him; and, in a fashion that all readers born in the twentieth century will understand, the speaker is befuddled by the recalcitrance of time itself: "All went on being Saturday/until Friday showed its face;" (105) "and leaning toward yesterday/were all the hours of the clock" (107). Eventually, time rushes backward, and he is returned to youth, to childhood, to the womb, and finally to the gametes, the physical particles, from which he sprang—played upon by time, even as he has played within time. The constructed self and the creative self are finally, though violently, reunited: we are compelled to resume our identity with the earth, only to rise again, presumably, to play another role in some new configuration of the struggle.

It would not be naïve to approach this collection with questions about what went wrong in the century from which we are, a decade later, still trying to extricate ourselves. In his *Memoirs*, Neruda blames the cult of the leader for the political excess-



Pablo Neruda

es that occurred during his lifetime. Visiting China in 1955, he sought to define the discomfort with which he involuntarily seemed to recall the rise of Stalin—"the repetition," in other words, "of a cult to a socialist deity" (236). He found in the adulation then bestowed upon Mao "a myth destined to lord it over the revolutionary consciousness, to put in one man's grip the creation of a world that must belong to all" (237). Similarly, in *World's End*, he painfully recalls his slow disillusionment with Stalinist Russia:

*It was the proliferation
of that steely portrait
that incubated the excesses.
We celebrate the hard brow
not seeing it was sizing us up—
beneath those Georgian eyebrows,
the testing eyes of the monarch,
the geology of terror. ("Worship II")*

The counterpoint and antidote to this self-abnegating adulation seems to be provided only by the figure of the poet. Unlike the leader, who peers outward, perhaps in fear of insurrection, the poet takes history into himself. The two are linked, obviously, in their special relationship to their age; and these two larger-than-life entities continually compete for our allegiance. The contest between them is the stuff of history. As Neruda remarks in his *Memoirs*, "I continue to work with the materials I have, the materials I am made of. With feelings, beings, books, events, and battles, I am omnivorous. I would like to swallow the whole earth. I would like to drink the whole sea" (264). Distilled down to a few ounces of pure perception, *World's End* proffers the wineglass of history—bitter, but complex, with an aftertaste of hope.

Sources:

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Hilary Turner teaches English at the University of the Fraser Valley.

REMEMBERING P.K. PAGE WHILE READING *COAL AND ROSES*

Rachel Wyatt

Coal and Roses is PK Page's second book of glosas. She was fascinated by the form. It allowed her to borrow lines by the some of the poets, past and present, whose work she loved, and to build on them.

I found the first lines of these six glosas particularly meaningful just now.

The Last Time

"I have been an omnivorous reader. . ."

When I moved to Victoria, in 1993, I had no idea that it would be the beginning of 17-year conversation with PK Page whom I had known only slightly before. We used to talk of many things including ships and sealing wax but books were our major topic. Light books, heavy books, fat books and thin books. Over lunch, or tea or drinks or dinner, we discussed literature both ancient and modern, fiction and non-fiction. Whether it was Le Clézio's *The Wandering Star*, or Barack Obama's *Dreams from my Father*, or Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*, our discussions added a great deal to my reading pleasure. PK's reading was wide and deep. She studied work on a variety of religious teachings and of philosophy and science. William James, George Steiner, Stephen Hawking, Isaiah Berlin, Idries Shah were all included in her library. The fact that PK was not a Jane Austen fan in no way lessened my regard for her!

On occasion, we revisited our early reading and could finish each other's quotations from *Winnie the Pooh*, *The Tailor of Gloucester*, and *Alice in Wonderland*. Our childhoods, separated by the Atlantic Ocean and several years, had a literary foundation that remained a pleasure to us both.

The Blue Guitar

"I do my best to tell it true"

PK always told it true. There was a rigour in her approach to life, to books, and very clearly to her own work. And she expected the same of others. Telling it true is not always the popular route but PK was not deterred. She spoke out in defence of the arts and in protest against any government policy she regarded as wrong. There was no hesitation. Injustice of any kind secured her attention whether the victim was an individual or an entire population.

She was also truly prophetic. 'Unless the eye catch fire,' written in the 70s, speaks clearly of the dangers of global warming, but in those days no one was listening.

soft travellers

". . .among the many magics there are words. . ."

Oh there are words! The magical surprise of PK's poetry is in her sudden use of some extraordinary phrase or term that makes the reader's mind leap and dance about with recognition. How did she know? How did she put her finger on that very place? How did she discover that? She placed her words with a sure and deft touch to create this image, or illustrate that perception.

Further in this glosa, she wrote of 'words correctly spelled' and this was something that mattered to her. The carelessness of some writing today, the slipshod grammar, were painful to her. How could supposedly educated people not care enough about words to make sure they're properly placed and spelt right! The casual orthography of the text generation appalled her.

And besides the magic of words, there was the magic of magic itself. Just a few years ago, we invited a few friends to a party and hired a local magician to entertain the guests. PK's delight in the mystery of the apparently impossible was a joy to see,



Coal and Roses
P.K. Page
Porcupine's Quill, 2009
96 pages, \$16.95

even when the conjuror seemed to be about to cut her friend's hand off with a little guillotine. She was always open to wonder and ready to be amazed.

Coal and Roses – A triple glosa

Based on a poem by Anna Akmatova, the first of these three glosas begins,
"I read the papers with my morning coffee."

Everything that happened in the world was of interest to PK. This week, we would have talked about the achievement of the scientists working on the Large Hadron Collider. We would have shared their excitement without exactly knowing how those protons could rush around at almost the speed of light and crash into each other or what it meant. We would have despaired perhaps over new acts of violence round the world, and wondered whether Ted Hughes would have been pleased to be relocated in the hallowed ground of Westminster Abbey among his peers. PK had met Hughes and greatly admired both the man and his poetry.

The first of these three glosas speaks of all the dire happenings in the world. The second mentions flowers and stars; the Perseid showers PK loved to see. And then finally with, "A gift of coal and roses," in asking us to imagine something beyond our grasp and yet within ourselves, she allows us to hope.

Paradise

"Paradise is really the same as Britain."

I miss PK's sense of humour above all: Those telephone conversations that left us both laughing even after we'd closed the connection. What did we find so funny? Now when I read a crazy item in the paper or hear of an odd happening, I reach for the phone to discuss it with her and realize she's not there. A sense of humour varies greatly from one person to another and when you find someone who looks at the world in the same oblique way as you do, who sees the irony in so much that goes on, it is a relationship to treasure.

After Chaos

"I had been dealt a blow. . ."

Not long before she died, PK was dealt a final blow. She accepted the diagnosis with her usual grace, and approached it with the curiosity that made her so interested in all aspects of life. She Googled the subject, she got in touch with experts, and finally she found a doctor who would "tell it true". She didn't care to be fobbed off with generalities. Like any writer though, at the same time as she was experiencing the difficulties of her condition, she would stand to one side and watch and consider her reactions.

PK loved life, and she loved the people in her life with a truly unstinting generosity.

We who loved her, her family and her many, many friends, have indeed been 'dealt a blow'. But as I read and re-read this particular poem, I can almost hear her voice offering solace to those of us who miss her every day, and saying, "The healing has begun".

Awarded the Order of Canada in 2002 and the Queen's Jubilee Medal in 2003, Rachel Wyatt has written scores of plays for the BBC and Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. She published The Magician's Beautiful Assistant with Hedgerow Press in 2005. She lives in Victoria.



Anna Akmatova

"A GRAVE ILLNESS"

Yvonne Blomer

First off, you may wonder what has possessed me to go back in time and select a poem from almost thirty years ago. Is it a sense of the morbid, the topic of the poem being of illness and the poet having recently died? I don't think so, though there is the desire to contemplate how P.K. Page approached death or illness or aging in her work, to try to gain an understanding of how she may have approached it in her final days.

More than personal gloomy curiosity, I have selected "A Grave Illness" because it is a beautifully written poem that contains in it many of Page's ways of rendering the world in poetry. To list a few, she is: honest, personal without being confessional, pays attention to sound, rhythm, rhyme without sounding quaint, unapologetic, curious, an explorer, uncompromising and she delves into the mystical.

Each of the three stanzas in this poem starts with the "someone" shovelling, the sound comes from the world outside, but gradually the two worlds – that of the ill narrator in her house and the outside world – merge: "Someone was shovelling gravel. Was it I?" The colour of the plum blossoms outside gradually moves inside; is equated with the narrator's blood: "trickling from above / through unresistant air/ fell on my eyes and hair/ as crimson as my blood."

This merging of the outside world and the inside world, this transformational experience through colour and sound, recalls the biblical Ezekial – who also had visions of "spokes of static wheels/ spinning and whirring". It recalls Page's own story about global warming, "Unless the Eye Catch Fire" published smack in the middle of *Evening Dance of the Grey Flies*. These notions are mystical in their approach; they are transformative; they capture a moment of transformation.

How does Page create this mystical moment?

I think she does it by using rhyme and repetition, also the situation is real, not real in the sense that I know for a fact that this experience is an authentic one to Page, but real in the sense that I can imagine it as an authentic experience to myself. I can put myself there, gravely ill, gravel being shovelled outside my window and the plum blossoms coming into bloom and hear, see and feel this transformation take place.

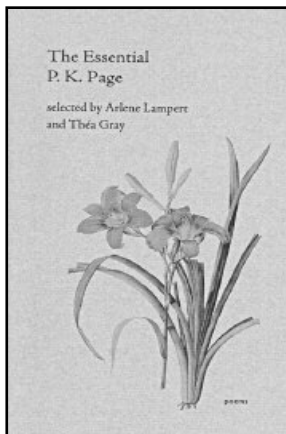
Page equates the sound of the shovel grating on the gravel with the sound of coughing. Each time that shovel hits rock, the narrator coughs so that, after a time, after it is repeated again, and then again at the end of the second stanza in "The shovel grated in my breaking chest" the sound of outside has moved into the body – shovel and cough are no longer distinguishable.

The third stanza is an almost euphoric embrace of the grating/coughing: "Was it I? Burying me in shifts and shards of rock/ up to my gasping throat. My head was out/." These lines are not iambic pentameter as much as each of them has five stresses giving a strong rhythm. They are followed by four rhyming lines: "blossoms trickling from above/ through unresistant air/ fell on my eyes and hair/ as crimson as my blood."

That last line allows for a total opening of the narrator, as if her chest has opened, as the hole in the gravel, as the 'grave' in the title. Our shift from the sound, to the colour of plum blossoms in those final five lines is a signal that an end is coming as in the sonnet's volta.

This is an expertly created poem. It comes as no surprise that Page can render such parallels, with such detail to colour and beauty imbued in death, or illness. This poem can be said to have come from the early part of her writing career but exemplifies many of her strengths.

Yvonne Blomer's first book a broken mirror, fallen leaf was shortlisted for the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award. She has twice been shortlisted for the CBC Literary Awards and has been published widely in Canada and abroad. In June Yvonne will present a tribute to P.K. Page at the League of Canadian Poets' AGM in Toronto. She is the host and organizer of the Planet Earth Poetry reading series, a series named after P.K. Page's poem "Planet Earth."



The Essential P.K. Page
P.K. Page
The Porcupine's Quill
2008

"A Grave Illness"

by P.K. Page, from *Evening Dance of the Grey Flies*,
Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1981

also found in: *The Essential P.K. Page*, The Porcupine's Quill, 2008

Someone was shovelling gravel all that week.
The flowering plums came out.
Rose-coloured streets
branched in my head –
spokes of a static wheel
spinning and whirring only when I coughed.
And sometimes, afterwards, I couldn't tell
if I had coughed or he had shovelled. Which.

Someone was shovelling until it hurt.
The rasp of metal on cement, the scrape
and fall
of all that broken rock.
Such industry day after day. For what?
My cough's accompanist?
The flowering trees
blossomed behind my eyes in drifts of red
delicate petals. I was hot.
The shovel grated in my breaking chest.

Someone was shovelling gravel. Was it I?
Burying me in shifts and shards of rock
up to my gasping throat. My head was out
dismembered, sunken-eyed
as John the Baptist's on a plate.
Meanwhile the plum
blossoms trickling from above
through unresistant air
fell on my eyes and hair
as crimson as my blood.



Recently our literary community
lost another author, poet
and valued friend,
Tanya Kern.
She will be missed.



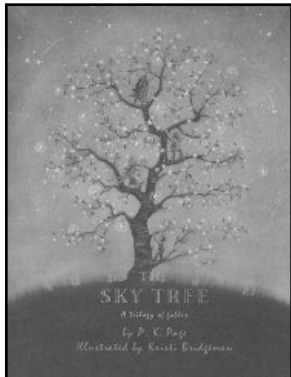
The Erotics of Memory
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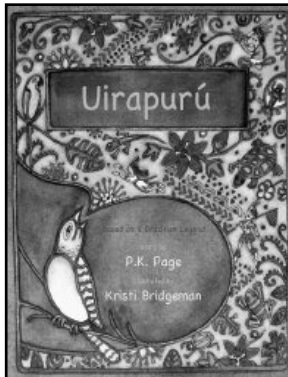
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P.K. PAGE'S CHILDREN'S BOOKS

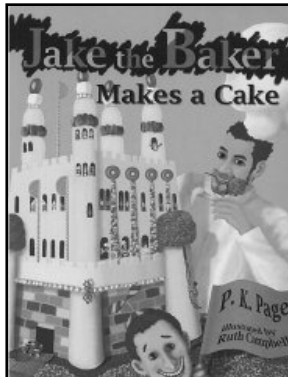
Sara Cassidy



The Sky Tree
PK Page
Oolichan Books, 2009



Uirapuru
PK Page
Oolichan Books, 2010



Jake, the Baker, Makes a Cake
PK Page
Oolichan Books, 2008

*It has to be loved the way a laundress loves her linens...
It has to be loved as if it were embroidered
with flowers and birds and two joined hearts upon it.*
- PK Page, *Planet Earth*

“That’s a good last name for a writer,” remarks my eight-year-old as he and his six-year-old brother tuck down for a bedtime reading of PK Page’s superb fairy tale trilogy, *The Sky Tree*. Toward the end of the book, the aging heroes climb high in a marvellous tree, on their way to meet “the Wizard” with his “body on fire” and his “suit of lights”. Suddenly, they are bound by unseen hands and thrust “gagged and helpless” into pitch-black darkness.

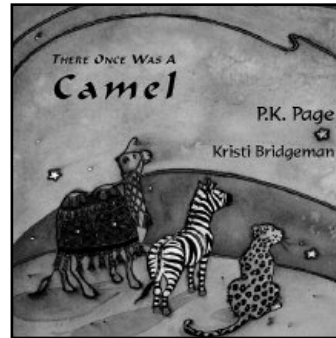
My boys are unearthly quiet; I realise they are both holding their breath. Meanwhile, my ten-year-old, in pyjamas, has joined us in the lamplit room, as if pulled by a magnet. The intensity of her attention is such that I can practically hear her listening. It strikes me that we are living that moment in Page’s glosa, *Autumn*, built on lines of Rilke’s:

*Night enters day like a thief.
And children fear that the beautiful daylight has gone.
Whoever has no house now will never have one.*

*It is the best and the worst time.
Around a fire, everyone laughing,
brocaded curtains drawn,
nowhere- anywhere – is more safe than here.*

As I read Page’s four children’s books this first, sputtering spring on the other side of her death, it was as though her poetry collections on my bookshelves greened with leaves and burst into bird song. The lovers of the poem *Adolescence* sighed in their “green embrace”, white mixing with their colours “as if they drew it from the flowering trees”, and the poet of *Single Traveller* found brief companionship in a “trilium covered wood”. Pear tree clippings fell to the floor as the husband in *Deaf Mute in a Pear True* wielded his “silent secateurs”, his “boots in the crotch of branches”; when he looks down at his wife, who is framed with inimitable Page cleverness as a bird – face upturned, her shape “foreshortened”, its arrival sudden and silent on the grass – love unlocks his throat, and his voice, “feathered joy/flyies screaming like a jay”.

Page’s children’s books *The Sky Tree* and *Uirapuru* are filled with greenery and birds, and with the hopeful-hopeless dance-struggle between love and mortality – each both blessing and thwarting the other – that energises many of her poems. In those final scenes of *The Sky Tree*, the lifelong lovers are separated, each alone while death binds them “like mummies”; the same image arises in *Single Traveller* when the poet in “a wasting world” asks whether she is “too bound and blinded by coarse wrappings/ever to know true love...?”



There Once Was a Camel
PK Page
Ekstasis Editions, 2008

Why, in the last three years of her life, with mortality pressing closer than ever, and after a lifetime of writing visionary poetics for adults, did Page turn her attention to children? In her note to *The Sky Tree*, she says, “Fairy tales are tales of hope. They are rich in reminders of perseverance and kindness. And, even more important, they persuade me that another, invisible world can manifest itself within our three-dimensional, daily one.” *The Sky Tree* offers the best of fairy tales; there are potions and spells, true love – between a princess and a lowly goatherd – and a naturalistically lush otherworld where human goodness is the weight in the balance. Page simply wanted to share her vision of a just, thriving world.

If the holy trinity of environmentalism is mortality, love, and nature, Page came to it easily. The picture book *Uirapuru* is set in the teeming Brazilian rainforest, where an old man plays the uirapuru’ song on his flute. There is only one uirapuru bird left in the world, he explains to a group of boys. “And if his song dies, the world, as we know it, will end. So I listen and listen and try to copy it exactly.” (There’s that deadly silence again, same as the deaf mute’s with his “silent secateurs”.)

The boys, having thought they’d heard a real uirapuru and feeling tricked, chase the man away. Without him, the forest is quiet, and they sleep.

And when they opened their eyes the full moon shone on an astonishing sight – a young woman – as shining and white as the moon itself, and around her, flying and flapping and hopping and running were all the creatures of the night. There were shiny black beetles and large pale moths and tiny green tree frogs and velvet moles and spotted nightjars and owls so small you could hold them in your hand.

The sensuality brings to mind Marianne Moore’s advice that a good poem should offer “imaginary gardens with real toads”. The advice is particularly good today, in this “wasting world”, where tangibility is our salvation.

Oorapuroooo. Oorapuroooooo. The bird sings. The dazzling young woman raises
(continued on page 13)

PRRB Preview: A Blast of the Beats



Photo: Carol Ann Sokoloff

Poet Michael McClure and publisher Richard Olafson chat about the *PRRB* in Seattle where McClure gave a workshop and launched *Mysteriosos*, his latest book of poems, from New Directions.

McClure’s Seattle workshop and new book will be reviewed in the next issue of the *Pacific Rim Review of Books*. Don’t miss it!

PK PAGE (continued from page 4)

get in touch with me about reading poems of mine. And then Murray, his brother, moved here and I knew Murray very well. I wrote the libretto or whatever you call it for *The Musicians of Bremen*, which the Victoria Symphony had commissioned, and I worked with Murray. I don't remember being part of much of an artistic community here at all. There were individual contacts, not community.

JB: Did you know Leonard Cohen?

PKP: Leonard is 20 years younger than I am. But I was in Montreal and knew all the writers in Montreal. Now in Montreal we did have a community. That's when we formed the *Preview* group and there were artists connected with us one way or another. There was a very active creative community there. It was wartime, and we had no money to do anything, but we were a community. A.M. Klein was probably our best poet in my opinion, and F.R. Scott...

JB: What about Irving Layton?

PKP: There were two groups, the *Preview* group and the *First Statement* group. Layton was in the *First Statement* group and Louis Dudek was in *First Statement*, but we all knew each other, fought with each other. There were a lot of artists affiliated with the group too...film people. There was a real sense of an artistic community there. I left Montreal and Cohen grew up just after I left and knew all these people. Layton bad-mouthed Cohen. Layton was a wretched man. He really was. He trashed women. I've never not spoken to anyone in my life, even if I disliked them, except Layton. I finally wouldn't. It was because I despised him so. But he wrote some good poetry. He wrote some very good poetry. I could have forgiven him being a womanizer; lots of men are, but to trash somebody, unforgivable. I saw women absolutely destroyed by Layton. Weird...

JB: What about Trudeau? A different kind of man, I imagine?

PKP: He was much more of an intellectual than Layton, I guess. I was a great fan of Trudeau and knew him slightly, very slightly. He read poetry, and he liked my poetry, which was always very flattering. He said it in print somewhere, I don't know where. He was a charmer, an absolute charmer. He gave you his full attention when he was talking to you. He wasn't looking around to see who else was around. It was as if you and he were alone in a room together talking. It was very intimate in a way. I don't mean personally intimate. He created an atmosphere of intimacy. He was fabulous. I can't remember his faults now. He did one or two political things that I didn't approve of, but I think he was wonderful nevertheless...

I've always been NDP, but I'm a little upset with Carole James and her stand on the Carbon Tax. [Premier Gordon] Campbell is a slippery fellow, a clever, clever bugger. Have you met him? I have, and you couldn't meet a more charming man. There are two of him. His social self, who is witty and charming, and his political self, who is...mean-spirited? Seems so to me. I got an Order of B.C. and he was there at the ceremony shaking hands and getting photographed, and he said "I don't imagine any of your friends would want a copy of this photo." [Laughing] It disarms you. The private man is quite witty and fast and charming.

[Seeming to notice the tape recorder for the first time, Page interjects:] "I forgot that I'm being taped..."

JB: You mentioned Dorothy Livesay earlier.

PKP: Dorothy was a great one for boosting herself, and she didn't stint in that. We didn't get on, Dorothy and I, but I admired her. She was feisty, liberated a lot of young women. She wrote a passionate piece about the Japanese-Canadiansⁱⁱ when nobody in Canada was paying any attention to the Japanese. She was an activist. I didn't like her poetry. I found it far too sentimental for my taste, but I admired her for all of that. She was an influence for good, I think. A whole lot of young women were freed by her, which is quite a record to have. Women are much freer today. In the fight to be free of male domination, women have had to face a lot of hard jobs.

JB: It seems many successful women have still had to choose between career advancement and having children. Do you think so?

PKP: Maybe we don't need families too much. We're overpopulated already, but we've got to go on having children. It's really a problem for China, India, and countries emulating our lifestyle. They won't be able to do it. There are too many prob-



P.K. Page received the Order of British Columbia in 2003

lems. I'm glad I'm not going to have to cope with all of that. I'm getting out of it. I'm getting out of it.

JB: Have you written poems about these problems?

PKP: I don't seem to write about issues.

JB: What about a poem like "Planet Earth" where you conclude with a beautiful short line about "smoothing the holy surfaces"?

PKP: I wasn't writing about it as an issue. It was an issue of course. I've been going on about global warming since the 1970s. I wrote that short story "Unless the Eye Catch Fire"ⁱⁱⁱ that was performed as a one-woman show, and this was before the scientists were talking about global warming. I can't say I was prescient. I was just writing a story, that's all I was doing. So, I suppose you could say I do write about issues, but it wasn't deliberately.

Two of my books are being launched today at Trent. One is probably the last serious book I'm going to write. When I say serious, I mean of any substance. It's a book of new poems called *Coal and Roses*, and I doubt I'll write another. I don't know if I have any more writing in me. I've got a kid's book called *The Old Woman and the Hen*...Anyhow, I've had a lot of books out in the last few years of my life. It's quite remarkable.

Notes

ⁱ Arthur Irwin, editor, publisher, diplomat and ardent Canadian nationalist married Page in 1950 and moved to Victoria with her in 1964, where he was publisher of the *Times Colonist* until 1971. He died in 1999 at 101 years.

ⁱⁱ Dorothy Livesay. *Call My People Home*. Original CBC broadcast, Vancouver, March 1949. In *Collected Poems: The Two Seasons*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson. 1972. pp. 180-194.

ⁱⁱⁱ Page, P.K. *Unless the Eye Catch Fire*. Toronto: Full Spectrum Press, 1994.

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

PK PAGE'S CHILDREN'S BOOKS (continued from page 12)

her bow and shoots into the dark. The bird falls to the ground, becoming a handsome young man. The dazzling couple soon meet the flute-player, who has perfected the bird's song. Enraged, the young man turns on the old man. But the old man shoots him through the heart. As he dies, a bird flies up into the branches, singing, its song now "everlasting". Page wasn't shy of Christian allegory!

Jake the Baker is less lush, sillier, and bluntly instructive. It's the story of generous-hearted Jake, in love with Rose, who sells his happiness to the grumpy Mr. Jeremiah (who then exclaims "I can sing like a bird!") Jake may now be flush, and worthy in the eyes of Rose's father, but his cakes fall and his bread won't rise. The message is clear: you can't buy happiness. Some of the poetry is dangerously close to doggerel: "Go away. I never want to see you./ Go away. I'm going to be a nun./ If I can't be married to my baker/I refuse to marry anyone" and the primitive computer art illustrations fall flat. (Page's other three books are filled with the gorgeous work of Vancouver Island's Kristi Bridgeman) Still, the story is lively, fast-paced, and has plenty of what all children love – cake.

For younger children, *There Once Was a Camel* is beautiful and playful. The book begins with a "camel dressed in enamel" and features a zebra who longs for a pair of striped pyjamas. As in *The Sky Tree*, this book ends at harrowing heights too, but with a light touch suited to younger readers:

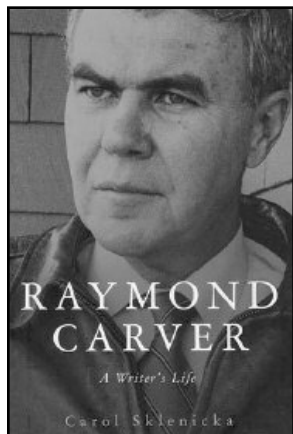
*A giraffe he knew
whose neck grew and grew...
Decided one day
He would go all the way –
And eventually end up in heaven.
In Heaven Ho, Ho. Up in heaven.
But I hasten to say
It's a very long way –
Much higher than any high hill.
And although we can't see
I imagine that he
May even be going there still. Tra La.
May even be going there still."*

Ah, rhyme and rhythm. They take the sting out of mortality. Woe that we've lost one of its best practitioners.

Sara Cassidy's novel for pre-teens, *Slick*, will be published this fall by Orca Books.

RAYMOND CARVER: A WRITER'S LIFE

Richard Wirick



Raymond Carver: A Writer's Life
Carol Sklenicka
Scribner, 592 pp., \$35.00

For those who remember the publication of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* in 1981, its importance is nearly impossible to exaggerate. The end of the prior decade was scorched by academic scrivening formulas, or otherwise filled with the genuinely talented minimalism of Mary Robison and Ann Beattie. But Carver's lean phrases offered something more filling, and cast a light into a world the writing school algorithms could never get a bead on: alcoholics and deadbeats talking in their own scratched voices, adrift in a world of ostracizing, unfamiliar abundance. As Robert Pope said: "People imitated him and found the way back into high realism, which has little to do with Carver's stories ... [T]heir comedy is peculiar; He could have fit perfectly into the experimental period, but instead he became this salvation of American literature."

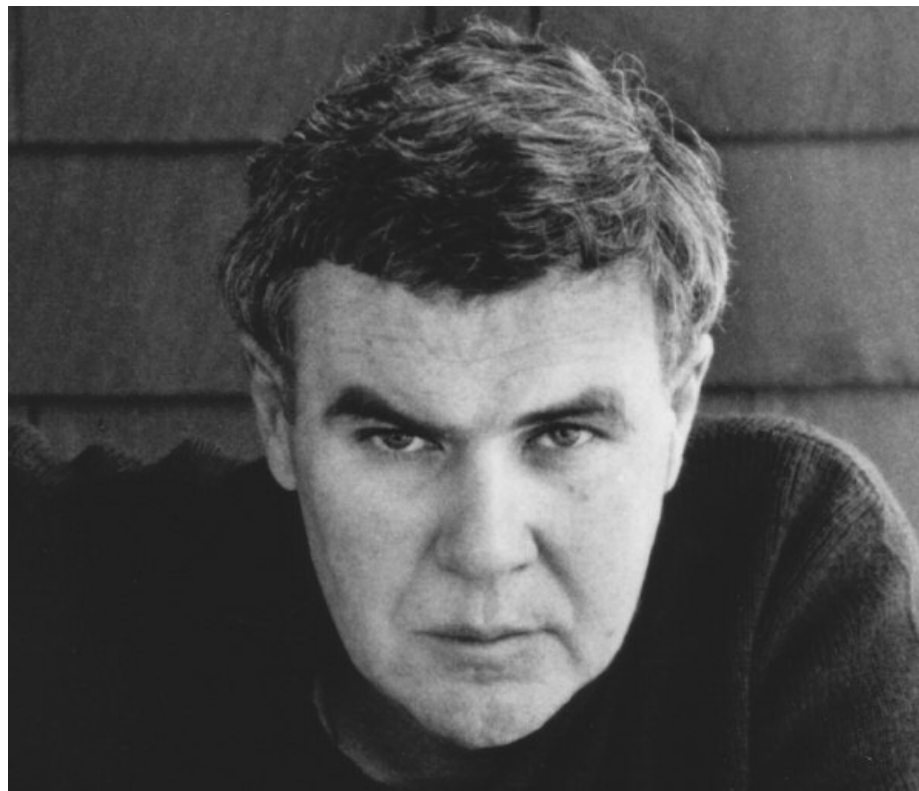
The facts of Carver's life are simple enough. While the blue collar atmosphere of his childhood friends' houses appeared stolid and predictable, the air in Carver's mill-town home quivered with menace. "Both parents' personalities were distorted by tension and anger, frozen by obstinacy," writes Carol Sklenicka in her new biography. According to Frank Sandemeyer, a co-worker of Carver's father in Yakima, Washington: "At the Carvers, [t]hings seemed as if the whole enterprise might fly apart at any minute." The atmosphere of his pre-teen years was captured in the germinal story "Nobody Said Anything," from his first collection *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* The story captures the theme that occupied Carver throughout his life: that of the divided self, which first manifests in the divided child. Like Pound's toddler of Dante standing rapturous before a fish's beauty in the Florence market, the young boy of "Nobody Said Anything" stands dumbfounded before a similar creature. But Carver's is a monstrosity, truncated and demeaned, the mythical symbol of the watcher's desire to be salvaged and redeemed: "He looked silver under the porchlight. He was whole again, and he filled the creel until I thought it would burst. I lifted him out. I held him."

After Carver met Maryann Burk in a Yakima donut shop in 1955, they began a family and a fierce itinerancy, Maryann finally settling them down to teach high school so Carver could write full time. Earning his degree at Chico State in California, Carver studied under John Gardner. The white-haired mentor, himself a mass of violent contradictions, inculcated in Carver both the desire to write serious literature and the warning that making a living that way was nearly impossible. Yet early publication successes coaxed him onward, kindling a bristly hope in his oversized athletic frame. On May 29, 1967, four days after his twenty-ninth birthday, Carver received news he called "the best thing that's happened, ever." "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?" had been selected for *Best American Short Stories* 1967, and Carver returned to Iowa City, a young contender in the fabled Writer's Workshop's ring of champions.

Gordon Lish accepted his work for publication in *Esquire*, and Carver fell under the vain, manic spell of the man who was to tout himself as "Captain Fiction." Newly sober after years of binging, Carver entered that period of his life he called "gravy:" everything that happened to him after his last drink in 1977. While Maryann saw Lish as a Machiavel to watch closely, Carver was too weak and dazzled to question the editor's ruthless control, his merciless parings and reworkings. If, as Lionel Trilling would have it, authenticity and sincerity are the watermarks of valuable prose, the two questions that haunt Carver's output beginning in the mid-seventies can be called the questions of authentic content and authentic voice.



Carol Sklenicka



Raymond Carver

These stories didn't really seem to be about working people. Working people are energetic. They can be dangerous and energetic, but they are not sitting around. I could see where [Carver] came from the working class, but he wasn't it. His stories were about graduate students' lives, but he smartly made his stories about vacuum cleaner salesmen or whatever.

This problem began to be corrected as Carver's mastery of vernacular improved. The later stories of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* still foregrounded dialogue, but settings and behavior fleshed out a more believable proletarian world. Where before there were simply duos speaking in empty rooms, scenes now simmered with yard sales gone haywire, thefts and repossessions, wobbling men finding the keys to strangers' houses in their coats.

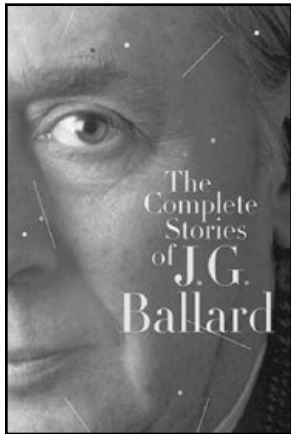
The issue of authenticity of voice-of whose writerly voice is really speaking-is the stuff of one of modern publishing's longest and most agonizing soap operas. The original versions of the *What We Talk About* stories, reprinted in a new Library of America collection of Carver, are dense with narration and have a more robust strain of dialogue. When these "A" versions were honed into the stories making up (what is now called) *Beginners* and sent to Lish, Carver had himself gotten them down to what he thought was "the bone." But the eventual "C" version brought into being by Lish shocked Carver, and left him vacillating between assertions that the editor was "a god" and a feeling that sounded like one of his inquisitive, mystified titles-this is not what I meant to say at all. As Sklenicka explains, Lish's perspective of the completed work-the almost skeletal sheen and polish of his version-took precedence over the original expressions, desires, and tastes of the artist. Lish offered no further proof for the necessity of his heavy hand than the fact that neither Carver nor his agents had been able to place the original copy with major magazines. Lish answered one of the author's letters with Socratic rapid-fire: "Which has the greater value? The document as it issues from the writer or the thing of beauty that was made? *What remains* is an artifact of power."

Though this writer certainly has his problems with Lish, I tend to agree with Captain Fiction here. The efforts of Tess Gallagher and others to reissue *Beginners* as the "real" *What We Talk About* was ill-advised. At its worst, it bordered on farce and was, albeit counterintuitively, an insult to the author. As Carver's good friend Richard Ford said (outraged at Gallagher's revisionism), a writer writes for readers, and the last step toward the reader is the granting of freedom to the editor with whom the manuscript is entrusted. Lish correctly persuaded Carver that earlier versions of the book were sentimental and structurally baggy, and he was right in saying that the final

(continued on page 16)

THE BIG BOOK OF BALLARD

Carol Cooper



The Complete Stories of J.G. Ballard
W.W. Norton
2009

W.W. Norton's new edition of J.G. Ballard's collected short stories is now the thickest book in my library. This hardcover dwarfs a Tibetan/Sanskrit/English dictionary and a complete anthology of Victor Hugo's poetry. In squeezing so much seminal Ballardian brilliance into one place the publishers had to push the envelope of standard packaging formats—you need both hands to steady and turn these pages, and high tolerance for necessarily tiny type. But trust me, Ballard's target audience appreciates the effort and aspirations involved in taking this project beyond the ordinary... almost by definition.

Last April, James Graham Ballard died at the age of 78 after a three-year battle with prostate cancer. *The Complete Stories of J.G. Ballard* now remains behind as a fitting tribute to one of Great Britain's most influential literary stylists. Even those who don't know his books may have seen Hollywood adaptations of two of his best known novels thanks to the admiration David Cronenberg had for *Crash* and the attraction Steven Spielberg felt for Ballard's semiautobiographical *Empire of the Sun*. But even with 18 respected novels to his credit (culminating with *Kingdom Come* in 2006), this review is all about the shorter stuff, much of which first appeared in classic science-fiction magazines, which clearly affirms Ballard's identity as a writer of "genre fiction."

Ballard himself says in an introduction which name-checks the kinds of writers he wants as peers: "At its best, in Borges, Ray Bradbury and Edgar Allan Poe, the short story is coined from precious metal, a glint of gold that will glow forever in the deep purse of your imagination." Ballard goes on to praise the "snapshot" quality of a good short story; alluding to the kind of literary craftsmanship that allows characters, setting, problem and resolution to be fully explained to a reader within a minimal amount of time and pages. Like a painting or a photograph, a great short story can deliver as swift and profound a sensory effect as any IV drug—something experimental writers from Poe to William Burroughs all found incredibly useful.

It's worth noting that once Ballard returned to England from his native Shanghai after being interned for two years with his family by Japanese troops during WWII, the artistic movement that first captured his attention was Surrealist painting. He has said that after witnessing the violent and chaotic end of the British Empire as a young white expat in Asia, seeing wildly deconstructed images painted by Ernst, Dali, and Tanguy, reaffirmed how he saw and understood the perceptibly unstable framework of human societies.

Little wonder that in college Ballard was initially drawn to psychiatry as a major although the demands of a formal medical career ultimately proved a less attractive reason to master Freudian analysis than professional storytelling.

Despite some minor successes in the early fifties, Ballard's writing didn't start paying his bills until after a short stint in the Royal Air Force and a series of odd jobs which included writing advertising copy and editing a scientific trade journal. Predictably, iconic elements of all his ancillary occupations would surface periodically in Ballard's prose.

Impressed by the narrative potential of SF-nal ideas as they appeared during the post-War years in various pulp magazines, he started trying to publish elegant little fables that encapsulized his study of human nature and would prefigure signature novels like *The Drowned World* and *Crash*. But what most helped Ballard make the stylistic transition from aspiring pro to acknowledged innovator was the cabal of like-minded editors and writers who welcomed his work into the pages of *New Worlds* magazine. There, fellow hipsters and risk-takers like Michael Moorcock and Brian Aldiss encouraged each other to surprise and provoke their U.K. audience, spurred forward by the youthful exuberance already transforming the pop art, fashion, music and culture of the swinging sixties. Inspired by synergistic Surrealist impulses, Ballard sometimes created graphic art and film projects to emphasize his written words, with often controversial results.

The 98 stories collected here are roughly chronological in order, and remarkably consistent in tone and perspective. These 1199 pages don't contain every short piece he ever did, (title to the contrary), but includes those published tales he would have considered his most emblematic. Ballard's authorial voice is as instantly recognizable as H.P. Lovecraft's...and Ballard's mythos of infinite psychological "inner space" is as seamlessly cohesive as Lovecraft's twisted non-Euclidian cosmos.



J.G. Ballard

It makes sense to compare Ballard and Lovecraft (or Ballard and Poe for that matter) as his short stories similarly pivot around the creeping horror of mysterious truths that are revealed as each protagonist discovers them. This technique of forcing a reader to share visceral experiences in real-time with the protagonist is not mere emotional identification with a fictional character. It's a more subtle and complex process of destabilizing the cognitive machinery just enough so that all theoretical distance between imagination and reality disappears. The brain gets thrown off its habitual hamster wheel and discovers fresh, uncharted territory. Ballard offers neither roadmap or flashlight for that unpaved road. His stories just relentlessly push his readers in the unmarked direction.

As early as the mid-50s Ballard depicted futuristic communities serenaded by bio-engineered flowers and mutating statues that grow. His women wandered such environments being willful, independent, and vaguely hostile; while his men—whether just earnest students from "The Concentration City" (1957) or the dilettant playboy in "The Volcano Dances" (1964) remain oddly obsessed with finding their way out of ordinary time and space altogether. Again and again, we encounter twin themes of claustrophobia and jailbreak, where even actual physical barriers are shown to be merely mental constructions. In "The Enormous Space" (1989) a suburban drone becomes desperate to escape his divorce, his depression, his job, and all the contextual reference points which define his existence. His method resembles a monstrous version of a shaman's vision quest: isolation and slow starvation until all familiar perceptions disintegrate, allowing him to briefly live free from conditioned behavior before he dies.

Despite the repetition of key motifs, Ballard's topical comments and intertextual embellishments show the author continuing to experiment with literary form and effects. Although the slow madness triggered by self-imposed isolation is addressed several times, sometimes it's treated as a function of physics like entropy, other times it's described as quasi-religious hysteria, and sometimes it's handled like a psychosexual disease, as in the Hitchcockian exercise titled "Motel Architecture." (1978)

But between all the mannered psychodrama he also penned deliberately playful riffs that pose narrative puzzles or tease meaning out of gimmicky structures, like concrete poetry. 1977's "The Index" was a list of annotated subject headings purporting to be salvaged from the suppressed autobiography of a well-connected "great man" and debunked spiritual leader. Similarly irreverent is 1985's "Answers to a Questionnaire" listing 100 witty and potentially scandalous replies to conveniently absent queries. Other, less simple marriages of form and function are less felicitous I think: "Zodiac 2000" for example, accomplishes what it was designed to do, but was built on a shakier conceptual foundation.

Because of his Freudian fascination with sexual pathologies, there have been many censorship battles over alleged perversity and pornographic content in Ballardian fiction. But in truth there is nothing in any of these stories that would render De Sade, or any of the French Decadants redundant. Indeed, Ballard's brilliant homage to Alfred Jarry, "The Assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy Considered as a Downhill Motor Race" (1966) is automatically less offensive than the original as it considers only the murder of an American president, not (like the ever imprudent Jarry) of the only son of God.

In interviews Ballard has admitted his distrust of all organized religions and

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CARVER (continued from page 14)

thing was the most beautiful.

Sklenicka’s history of these struggles is compelling, though her prose can be clumsy and turgid. What she handles best is the dichotomies, the contradictions that lie behind the personalities of the greatest artists, what Updike said was “the good and bad in every man, that is more interesting than whether he is actually good or bad.” This encompasses both craftsmanship and morality. Sklenicka shows how Carver could be like Faulkner. When writing badly, he wrote truly abysmally; when writing well, his words possessed the power of revelation. She recounts his undivided loyalty to friends and supporters and his late-life lover Gallagher, existing as it all did beside his grim view of his “baleful” children and his terrible mistreatment of Maryann. Carver’s disparities were exemplified in his physical presentation. When I heard him read with Gallagher at the old Venice Jail (apropos) in 1988, scarcely a year before his death, he recited the late, majestic story “Elephant.” An awe settled over the audience, after lavish, reverential introductions. But his high, tinny voice grated, seeming to so contradict the frame it came from.

All in all, Sklenicka has done Carver and literary biography a great service with this volume. The notes on sources and tables and grids of first publications form a beautiful history of 1980s magazine prose, and her treatment of Carver’s late, supremely nourishing friendships (Ford, the brothers Tobias and Geoffrey Wolff, William Kittredge) are especially touching and subtly presented. Her chosen excerpts from the stories return you to the jolts those lightning-rod paragraphs had when you first read them, like my favorite, the opening sentences of “Mr Coffee and Mr Fixit”:

I’ve seen some things. I was going over to my mother’s to stay a few nights. But just as I got to the top of the stairs I looked and she was on the sofa kissing a man. It was summer. The door was open. The TV was going. That’s one of the things I’ve seen.

Thank you, Mr. Carver, for so sharply condensing tens of thousands of words of Freud. And thank you, Mr. Lish, for condensing this out of whatever was its original form.

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

BALLARD(continued from page 15)

most existing governments. He’s not exactly a misanthrope, but he allows the historical record to vindicate his somewhat unflattering take on his own species. But it’s clear throughout this definitive collection that Ballard writes in large part to explain us to ourselves, which is why so much of his work vibrates with apocalyptic energy.

Ballard wrote many stories about war, and many stories about terrorism. He was better prepared for 9/11 than most because he had never forgotten the political bombings that plagued British and European civilians in the 1970s. Overtly political broadsides are nestled between the futuristic fantasies and arty techno-fetishism Ballard is famous for. “Why I Want to Fuck Ronald Reagan” (1968), a vicious and only slightly tongue-in-cheek lampoon of Ronald Reagan associating his media image with latent homo-eroticism and his facial tics with Nixon and Hitler, emerges from the same unholy blend of Guy Debord and subversive media studies that Situationist International would send to the bookstore and the barricades. Indeed, “Theater of War” (1977)—written to resemble a television documentary about U.S. troops occupying England to defend American interests during class-based civil unrest—was a shrewd enough prediction to resonate like a warning shot across the bow of Thatcher’s ship of state.

My favorites among his war stories were all written between ’88 and ’89. “The Secret History of World War 3” aims more pot-shots at Reagan; “The Largest Theme Park in the World” considers ways to sabotage a future “United States of Europe”; and “War Fever” puts a whole new spin on the Middle East situation. Each begins as a nuanced, plausible political conceit draped over a sturdy science-fictional premise which then is rendered air and water tight with compelling logic. Ballard might be celebrated for his dark, pervy tone poems, but he deserves equal acclaim for his manic cautionary tales.

In science fiction (or *speculative fiction*, as Ballard might prefer) Ballard became one of the tireless standard-bearers of “New Wave” SF, determined to raise the bar for how sophisticated, insightful and dynamically written genre fiction could be. In the 1980s young bands would take their names and song titles from his stories. He made America’s cyberpunk vanguard debate how far language itself could be pushed to serve and embody complex ideas. Ballard dazzled them all by blending art and politics and science and sex in his work with cinematic intensity and enough semiotic savvy to help define the current age. And I’m betting this posthumous collection will only increase the ranks of his disciples.

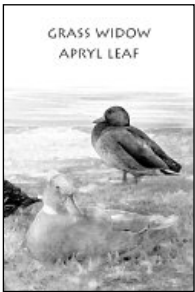
Read J.G. Ballard’s short stories. Then decide for yourself if he got any of it right.

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



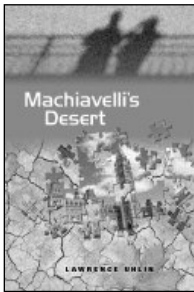
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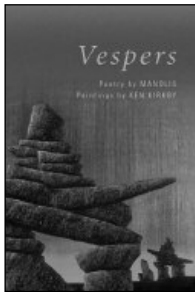
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CAVAFY'S OTHER WORLDS

Mike Doyle

Given that the last new English translation of Cavafy's work, Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard's *C.P. Cavafy: Collected Poems* appeared as long ago as 1975, these present offerings, coming as they do from very different sources, are a bonanza.

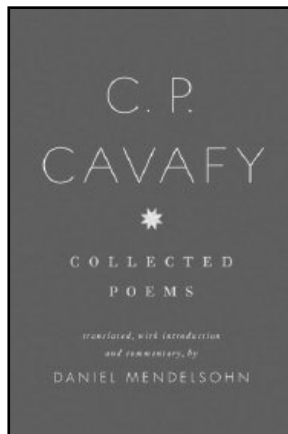
To sketch a background: Cavafy, an Alexandrian Greek, was one of the great international poets whose life straddled the 19th-20th centuries. Like W.B. Yeats, Cavafy lived from the 1860s to the 1930s, but whereas Yeats was already famous in his twenties, Cavafy remained relatively obscure until late in life. English was Cavafy's second language, his family had a strong business connection with England, and the poet himself lived there seven years from the age of nine. It is perhaps pertinent to mention that his mother longed for a daughter (he had a clutch of brothers) and in his infancy Cavafy (like Hemingway) was kept in long curly hair and frocks.

Cavafy's poetry was first published in English by E.M. Forster in a 1922 anthology. It was Forster who said that Cavafy, 'lived at a slight angle to the universe'. That Forster was a friend, coupled with the fact that Rae Dalven's *The Complete Poems of Cavafy* (1961, expanded edition 1976) is introduced by W.H. Auden, may signpost a central aspect of Cavafy's life. A middling bureaucrat with modest (or no) income, he was a deeply discreet homosexual, which accounts for much of the flavour of his work. Like Forster's Dr. Aziz, a central character in *A Passage to India*, Cavafy wrote a poetry of pathos and nostalgia, in Cavafy's case often of haunted memories of passion, frequently embedded in classical history.

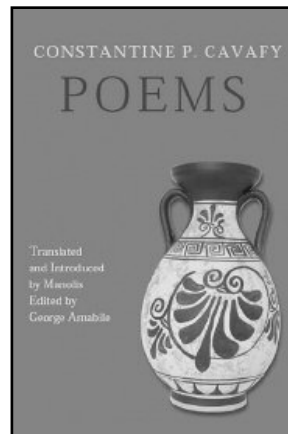
For myself, I discovered Cavafy's poetry in the 1950s, most likely source being the poet's 'presence' in Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*, a gift from my wife in 1958. The first edition of Dalven (1961) has been a standby for nearly fifty years. I should also mention the very first English translation, John Mavrogordato's *The Poems of C.P. Cavafy* (London: Hogarth Press, 1951), but I've not seen that one for many years.

For me then, in a sense, the 'default' translation is Dalven's, but now we come to the question of translation itself, particularly translation of poetry. On this there are two schools of thought, with nuanced positions between. Loosely speaking, these may be dubbed 'literalist' and 'Poundian'. A literal translation is one in which as nearly as possible, the English version should be an exact transfer from the original language; in contrast, the idea of Pound and others was (and is) that a translation first and foremost try to capture the 'spirit' of the original and transform it into poetry in English. Pound himself, and Robert Bly, are two notable exponents of this method, the method I favour because I am more interested in poetry than in literal accuracy. This can lead to problems, though, and it is common for one poet to provide 'versions' of poems from half a dozen different languages only some of which he speaks! (Pound and Bly each did this).

As regards Cavafy's poems, I have no knowledge of their original language, Alexandrian Greek, but have been in their (English) company for near half a century. What I can do is read the new books, Mendelson and Manolis as poetry (I am not sure of the extent and nature of Amabile's editing of Manolis, but he is a fine poet in his own right.) My first thought was to compare, poem for poem, these new texts with the ones provided by Dalven and Keeley. I have not the space to do that, but will try



Collected Poems
C.P. Cavafy
(New York: Knopf, 2009) translated, with an introduction and commentary by Daniel Mendelsohn



Poems
C.P. Cavafy
(Surrey, B.C.: Libros Libertad, 2008, translated and introduced by Manolis, edited by George Amabile)



Constantine Cavafy

to give some indication. Otherwise, it is a pleasure in store for the reader.

Some points should be made. Cavafy's poetry is close to prose. He makes little use of figurative language. He had a strong sense of history, but took little or no interest in the twentieth-century. As the critic and memoirist Timos Malanos said that the past was the atmosphere of Cavafy's imagination. Any number of the poems, many featuring classical Greece, manifest this. The distinctive, indeed unique, character of his poetry is in his tone of voice and, in looking at several translations one valid and useful criterion is to figure out which best captures that tone of voice.

Mendelsohn sets out to explore Cavafy's technical abilities. He provides two hundred pages of contextual, historical and technical notes, including 18 pages on technique, plus a sketch of the life. Thus his text is valuable for scholarly approaches. It does not follow that his translations are always the best available as poetry. As a print job, his book has the textual elegance of Knopf's *Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*, published over fifty years ago, plus some of the distinction of British Nonesuch and Reynard books published back then.

A book on the same scale as Mendelsohn's is the Keeley/Sherrard *Collected Poems* (Princeton, 1975.) These translators, with their editor George Savidis, aimed at working from a reliable text to present an English-language one, presenting the poems in proper chronological sequence. This work appears to have maintained status as the 'go to' text for at least three decades. That said, there is no need in my view to choose among available texts, though perhaps Mendelsohn will take precedence with scholars, but rather to make use of all of them as far as the poetry is concerned. The fact that I have clung to Dalven is more or less accidental.

Cavafy's homosexuality began to come to public notice when he was around twenty. This, combined with his family's loss of wealth and position, made him and his brothers feel *declassé* even when they returned from Constantinople, where their family business had shifted from London, to Alexandria in 1885 (Cavafy was 22). For one reason or another Cavafy's psyche embedded a sense of loss, as expressed in 'Voices'. This short poem (nine lines) ends, in Dalven:

echoes

*return from the first poetry of our lives –
like music that extinguishes the far-off night.*

Keeley:

*sounds from our life's first poetry
like distant music fading away at night.*

Mendelsohn:

*sounds from the first poetry of our life –
like music, in the night, far off, that fades away.*

Manolis:

echoes

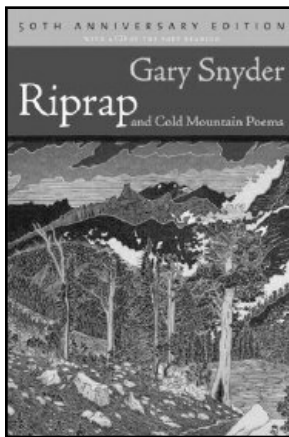
*return from the first poetry of our lives –
like distant music, at night, that slowly fades away.*

These scraps begin to show how differently the same text can be translated. Manolis' 'slowly' seems gratuitous. In a deft move, Dalven shifts the fade-out from the music to the night itself. Both Mendelsohn and Manolis use commas in the final line. In Mendelsohn's case this seems to be done with a purpose as the commas chime in with the rhythm to create a hesitancy opposite in effect to Dalven's extinguishing. Such consideration may be applied to every poem in all four translations. As I've experienced them, no one translator stands out as superior to the others. Matters vary from

(continued on page 19)

GARY SNYDER'S "RIPRAP" AT FIFTY

Tim McNulty



Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems
Fiftieth Anniversary Edition

Gary Snyder
Counterpoint, Berkeley,
2009, \$24.00, hardcover

With the opening lines of the lead poem in “Riprap,” Gary Snyder’s first book of poems, something new emerged in American poetry.

*Down valley a smoke haze
Three days heat after five days rain
Pitch glows on the fir-cones
Across rocks and meadows
Swarms of new flies*

from “Mid-August at Sourdough
Mountain Lookout”

The freshness and tactile immediacy of the images, a direct and unsentimental observation of the world at hand, and the clean, spoken nature of the language permeate the poems in this collection. These traits became hallmarks of Snyder’s work through sixteen volumes of poetry and essays over the next half-century. Accolades and awards, including a Pulitzer Prize, followed. But in 1959, this first book of 23 poems by a young American poet living in Japan offered a new range of possibilities to poets everywhere.

To celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of “Riprap’s” publication, Counterpoint has released a special edition of “Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems.” The book features stunning cover art by woodblock artist Tom Killion, and afterword by the poet, and a CD of the poet reading the collection.

It’s fitting that this slim but influential volume should receive such generous treatment. “Riprap” established its author as one of the most distinctive poets of his generation. It set forth themes that the poet continued to develop throughout his life: attentiveness to the physical world and reverence for the mystery it holds, compassion for fellow beings, respect for other cultures and spiritual traditions, honor for the dignity of work, and a belief in the transformative power of poetry.

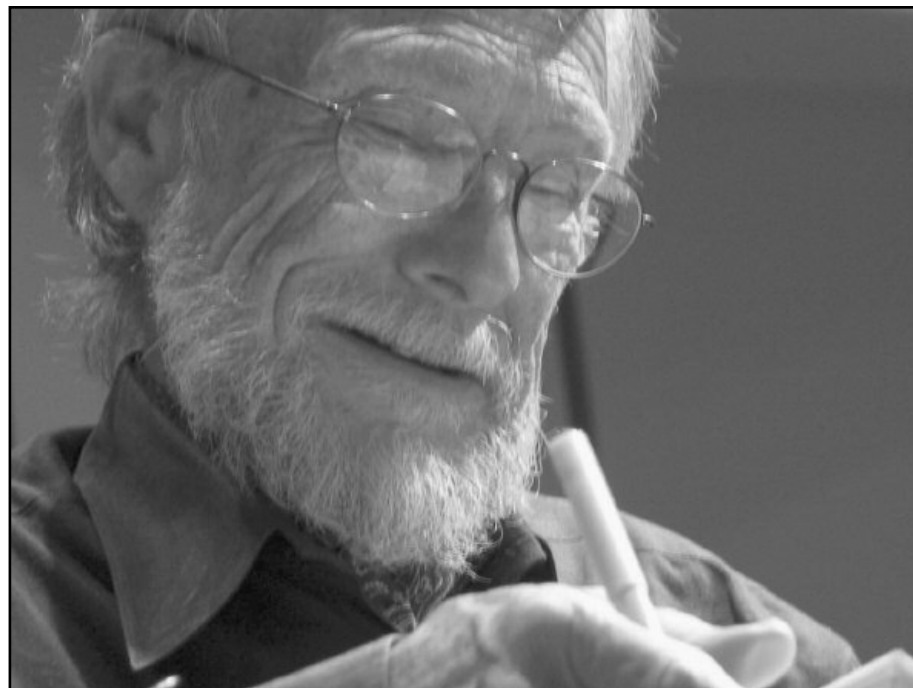
What’s more, “Riprap” had a tremendous influence on poetry of the second half of the twentieth century. While the work was original, Snyder’s larger themes were not entirely new. Ezra Pound had introduced an Oriental esthetic into American poetry with “Cathay” some 40 years earlier. William Carlos Williams brought the rhythms of spoken American English into his work. And both Jeffers and Rexroth focused on wild nature as suitable subject matter for their poems. But none of these earlier poets wove those strands together as organically — or explored them as deeply — as Gary Snyder.

This had everything to do with who he was and where he came from.

By 1959, when “Riprap” was first published in a small, string-bound Japanese edition, the poet had lived over a year in Japan, studying Zen Buddhism at Rinko-in temple. Prior to that, Snyder’s post-college years (Reed, 1951) were spent working a range of wilderness jobs in the American West and abroad: fire lookout in Washington’s North Cascades, logging in eastern Oregon, trail work in Yosemite, as well as crewing on freighters at sea. These occupations placed the poet squarely in the working class, story-telling traditions of mid-century America. It was a culture Snyder knew well, having grown up on a Depression-era stump ranch in rural Washington state. It is no surprise that “Riprap” is dedicated to a dozen of Snyder’s working comrades “in the woods & at sea.”

The years during which these poems were written were a formative time in the poet’s life. Following formal studies in anthropology and linguistics, he was undertaking serious training in Zen Buddhism. In an afterword to this edition, Snyder writes that by the time he was 24, he was ready to put poetry aside. “My thinking had turned toward linguistics, ... North American oral literature, and Buddhism.” After a year of graduate studies in Oriental languages at Berkeley, he signed on for a season of trail work in the High Sierra of Yosemite. Steeped in physical labor amidst stunning mountain landscapes, “...my language relaxed into itself. I began to be able to meditate nights, after work, and I found myself writing some poems that surprised me.”

The suite of Sierra mountain poems that form the heart of this collection were



Gary Snyder writing

written when the poet was 25. “Piute Creek,” “Milton by Firelight,” “Above Pate Valley,” “Water,” “Hay for Horses,” and the title poem, “Riprap” capture striking elements of the mountain landscapes as well as a sense of the power and mystery of the land. Fifty years later they stand as some of the finest poems in our literature evoking the experience of American wilderness. Spare, crystalline images capture the essence of transcendence, as in this passage from “Piute Creek.” The poet is alone on a moon-lit ridge high over a wilderness valley in the High Sierra.

*The mind wanders. A million
Summers, night air still and the rocks
Warm. Sky over endless mountains.
All the junk that goes with being human
Drops away, hard rock wavers
Even the heavy present seems to fail
This bubble of a heart.
Words and books
Like a small creek off a high ledge
Gone in thin air.*

Snyder describes this work as “...a poetry of minimal surface texture with the complexities hidden at the bottom of the pool.” Like the classical Chinese poems he had been translating, the simplicity of structure relies on spare language and images to tap the depths of a reader’s imagination. As spiritually connected to wild nature as the poetic moment is in “Piute Creek,” the slight tension of an observing, educated mind is deftly captured in the poem’s closing image.

*Back there unseen
Cold proud eyes
Of Cougar or Coyote
Watch me rise and go.*

Snyder wrote, for Donald Allen’s 1960 anthology, “The New American Poetry,” that the rhythms of the poems of this period reflect the physical rhythms of the work he was doing and the life he was leading at the time. Listen to those rhythms as expressed in this passage from “Hay for Horses.”

*With winch and ropes and hooks
We staked the bales up clean
To splintery redwood rafters
High in the dark, flecks of alfalfa
Whirling through shingle-cracks of light,*

This clean, direct, unsentimental approach was new in American poetry, but it wouldn't be for long. Robert Bly's "Silence in the Snowy Fields" (1962), Galway Kinnell's "Body Rags" (1968), Robert Sund's "Bunch Grass" (1969), and a host of younger poets' work all bear the influence of Snyder's pioneering poetics.

In 1956, the poet moved to Japan for the first time and his immersion in an older culture with a strong spiritual tradition gave birth to a series of more contemplative poems. Lyrics from Shingon and Shinshu temples, "Kyoto: March" and "A Stone Garden" are set more from an observer's than a participant's perspective. They frame Japan's Buddhist traditions and strong familial ties within a broader view of post-war Japanese life and what could be seen as an acceptance of mortality.

*The cities rise and fall and rise again
From storm and quake and fire and bomb,
The glittering smelly ricefields bloom,
And all that growing up and burning down
Hangs in the void a little knot of sound.*

from "A Stone Garden"

The last few poems in "Riprap" come from endless months working aboard rustbucket ships. Departing in tone somewhat from the preceding poems, they embrace (and grouse about) the drudgery of life at sea, but always in Snyder's distinctive rhythmic voice.

*...cheap magazines, drunk
brawls, low books and days at sea; hatred of machinery
and money & whoring my hands and back to move this
military oil—*

from "T-2 Tanker Blues"

In 1965 Donald Allen's Four Season's Foundation reissued "Riprap" together with Snyder's translations of the T'ang Dynasty mountain recluse, Han Shan or "Cold Mountain." Han Shan's poems embody the insight, compassion, and biting wit of the Chan or Zen Buddhist tradition. And Snyder's pithy translations, begun at U.C. Berkeley and honed during his residence in Japan, render the poems fresh, lively and relevant today.

*On the bare plum, flowers of snow
On the dead stump, leaves of mist.
At the touch of rain it all turns fresh and live
At the wrong season you can't ford the creeks.*

from "14, Cold Mountain Poems"

Along with the popular translations of Kenneth Rexroth, the Cold Mountain poems brought a new generation of readers to classical Chinese poetry. For poets coming of age in the 1960s, they introduced a new aesthetic element into contemporary poetry.

An added treat in this edition is a CD of the poet reading the entire collection. Recorded this year [2009] at the poet's home in the Sierra foothills, the tone is measured but the voice is sure and distinct. The Han Shan translations are a particular pleasure to hear as the poet rarely reads them at public readings. The publishers have thoughtfully added a recording, recently discovered, of six poems from "Riprap" read by the poet at Reed College in 1956. This was less than a year after the Yosemite poems were written, and in this earlier recording one can clearly hear the "rhythms of the work" Snyder was doing at the time. Like the re-release of Glen Gould's "Goldberg Variations, 1955 and 1981," I prefer the earlier renditions; they are a bit more rough-edged and impassioned — closer to the poems as I grew up with them.

Thoreau held that "steady labor with the hands" is the best way of getting rid of "palaver and sentimentality" in one's writing. It was a lesson learned of necessity by the young Snyder, and it broadened and deepened his mature work. A fresh look at "Riprap" fifty years down the trail should help restore that old bit of wisdom to a new generation.

Tim McNulty is a poet and nature writer living in Washington State. His 2005 chapbook "Through High Still Air" gathers poems from a season working at Sourdough Mountain lookout fifty years after Gary Snyder's season there.

CAVAFY (continued from page 17)

poem to poem. One point worth making is that our local translator, a Greek-Canadian in background, does not suffer from the comparison.

His book's forward, however, takes us right back to the 'CanLit' question: 'The moment you translate something as a Canadian, because you are interpreting it into English as spoken in Canada, and it is informed by the imagery and culture of the target language, it becomes a work of Canadian literature.' This is quoted in Manolis from Quill and Quire, May 2008. Well, yes, maybe, well, uh sure, but does it matter? That business about, 'informed by the imagery and culture of the target language', seems highly dubious, especially in the present context where presumably the translator undertook the task because he is 'informed by the imagery and culture' of the Greek language?



Constantine Cavafy




Let us shift nimbly away from that one! It has been said of Cavafy that he was not a 'born' poet, but developed slowly. This point has also been firmly denied, by none other than Cavafy's great successor, George Seferis. On the other hand, Dalven followed by Keeley and Sherrard divide their collections into 'before 1911' (the date from which the poet, age 48, felt he had fully become 'Cavafy') and after. Our two new volumes, on the other hand (is there research behind this?) follow a strictly chronological presentation.

Back in the seventies, as if supporting Seferis, Robert Liddell, in *Cavafy: A Critical Biography*, wrote: 'in Cavafy's work from first to last there is a unity of mood, of mental climate, of Weltanschauung — and it would be hard to deny this'. Seferis wrote: 'at about 1910 [the very year in which Modernist novelist Virginia Woolf claimed 'human nature changed'] — the work of Cavafy should be read and judged not as a series of separated poems but as one and the same poem, a "work in progress"' (Seferis, *On Greek Style*, UK trans, 1966) which seems right, though it compromises Seferis' own claim about the unity of Cavafy's work. It chimes in with the approaches of such writers as Joyce, Eliot, Pound and Williams, and in and of itself marks Cavafy as a Modernist.

The Manolis and Mendelsohn translations are welcome additions in making the work of a great poet more accessible.

Mike Doyle is a poet, critic, biographer and editor. He is the author of Paper Trombones: notes on poetics, a journal of his life as a poet in Canada.

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NO ONE LISTENS TO POETRY

JACK SPICER COMPOSES THE REAL

Peter Grant

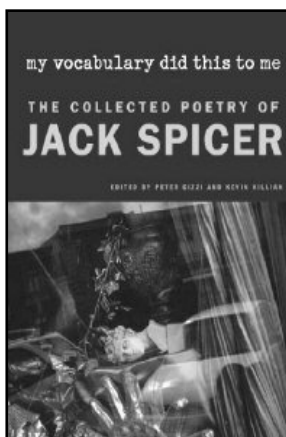
Jack Spicer has been dead longer than the forty years he was alive. Not long enough — in my humble opinion — to use the poet's next-to-last words as the title of a collected poetry. That title sure is a downer. "This" was Spicer's untimely self-destruction, his organ-devouring implosion in a San Francisco hospital after two-plus years of heavy drinking. Is morbidity the keynote of Spicer's achievement? I'm asking because the matter of his character is far from clear, his achievement far from generally accepted. When a biographer approached San Francisco poet/publisher/bookseller Lawrence Ferlinghetti in the 90s he said, "Why would anyone want to publish a biography of Spicer? He's almost forgotten nowadays, isn't he?" (*Poet Be Like God* 290). You won't find Spicer in the Postmodern volume of Rothenberg's and Joris's anthology *Poets of the Millennium*. (Without Spicer, I want to yell, it's flawed!) Or he's lumped with the Beats, a not-Ginsberg. Who doesn't know about the Gallery Six reading that launched Allen Ginsberg's career? He wrote "Howl/for Carl Solomon" for the occasion. Jack Kerouac described it (*Dharma Bums*, quoted in Davidson, *San Francisco Renaissance*, 3) as "the night of the birth of the San Francisco Renaissance. Everyone was there." Correction, Jack — two of the originators of the Gallery Six weren't there: Robert Duncan and Jack Spicer. They built the platform for Ginsberg's launch. Spicer evinced bitter scorn for Ginsberg's success and carried on a playful feud with the Beats — "Be bop de beep/They are asleep" — but it's a matter of record that Spicer, ever the anarchist, ever the local activist, continued to build community among poets, gay and straight, of the Bay area; was legendarily accessible at The Place or Gino & Carlo's, giving ear to fresh poetic creations, a basket nearby for submissions to one or another mimeo'd journal. The un-Beats had no fixed identity and shunned the ambition for fame. But when Spicer died the San Francisco Renaissance was gone like morning dew.

Did poetry bring Spicer low? Robert Duncan thought so: "It is a serious criticism of Spicer's creation in poetry that he believed in ghosts and remained sceptic of and even antagonistic to life forces" (*Poetry/Audit* 59, quoted in *The Fire: Collected Essays of Robin Blaser*, "The Practice of Outside," footnote 9). Blaser refuted that notion: "Death and ghostliness [in *After Lorca*] must be seen, not as a choice against life or even a helplessness within it, but as a literal pole, where life is present to a point and then suddenly absent from an articulation" (PO). Blaser believed the onset of Spicer's lethal heavy drinking started late — a serious automobile accident in the late fall or early winter of 1962/63 seems to have triggered it (*Poet* 255, 355-6).

What then is "my vocabulary?" In 1980 Duncan published a remarkable tribute to Spicer (his companion, with Blaser, of the post-war Berkeley Renaissance) that argues a morbid fatalism in Spicer's poetic stance:

It seems true indeed that he died of a disease of the language game. Bridge, Chess, Pinball, the great American spectator sports Football and Baseball, and language, produced messages: sportscasts relayd binds and double-binds. In this sense of the death-throes underlying life, of the rules of the game, he was throughout an original of such power in my own imagination as a poet that whole areas of my creative consciousness still seem to me to have to do with a matter that was ultimately from him. His wit and his fine critical intelligence from the beginning are sharpened and exercised in a never-ending battle against the autistic drive of the poem for him. (One Night Stand, Preface; "autistic" is not a typo.)

In Blaser's account, however, Spicer worked where art and philosophy merge in an adventure of "composing the real." (PO) "Jack's poetry takes on the experience, so exact to our present condition, that where we are is equally an experience of not being



my vocabulary did this to me: The Collected Poetry of Jack Spicer
Edited by Peter Gizzi
and Kevin Killian
Middletown CT:
Wesleyan University
Press, 2008

there at all—of disappearing and destroyed men—of fallen hierarchies and broken honesties, like towers, that once were governments. . . . Disbelief and invisibility are as real to experience as belief and visibility." (PO) Poetry itself is transformed through "the reversal of language into experience." In Blaser's telling, Spicer's creativity is a wonder of discovery at the edge of existence. Pathology it's not.

This volume brings back into print most of two previous gatherings. The 1975 *Collected Books* followed Spicer's exact sense of what was meaningful — the "books" of poems whose "serial" selection/arrangement and, increasingly, the texts were "dictated" to the poet from "outside" — and they're here intact. In *One Night Stand*, Don Allen selected from Spicer's early and singular poems — but not all of them are here. Notably absent is *The Bridge Game*. Several pages of Duncan's preface to *One Night Stand* explicated the hermetic nature of the poem, where a seeming simple round of bidding morphs into a Tarot reading. He regarded *The Bridge Game* as a signal piece of the puzzle that was Jack Spicer: "The rebus of twenty years to come—he will die in his forty-first year—is given." Linking the poem to Spicer's last words, Duncan asked: "Is it this that is his 'vocabulary'?" (ONS xiv) Such omissions from the *Collected Poetry* are accounted thus: "The poems we chose not to include from this period [1945-56] are poems that we deemed to be largely student work, imitations, or formal exercises." (mv xxx) Which of these is *The Bridge Game*? The editors do promise a second volume. Spicer's published oeuvre has also been enlarged by poems from both his early and mature periods, letters, "fugitive works retrieved from notebooks" (mv xviii), unearthed by the editors in a trunk that Blaser inherited as literary executor and deposited in the Bancroft Library at Berkeley. A minor cavil: there are no running headers. It's difficult to navigate a diverse text, with serial groups and stand-alones in chronological sequence, without referring to the table of contents.

A really intractable problem of organization is posed by the evolution of Spicer's own thinking about his work. The Admonition to Blaser circa 1957 illuminated the divide —

. . . all my stuff from the past (except the [Imaginary] Elegies and [the epic play] Troilus) looks foul to me. The poems belong nowhere. They are one night stands filled (the best of them) with their own emotions, but pointing nowhere, as meaningless as sex in a Turkish bath. (mv 163)

He wanted them burned. Regardless, the *Collected Poetry* follows chronology, leading with poems Spicer wrote while at Berkeley in 1945. The editors simply divided the book into the periods Spicer delineated. It's not quite accurate to say the *Collected Books* included only the Books of Spicer's mature poems. The six Imaginary Elegies and some early stand-alones were included — in an addendum and set in smaller type. I guess a return to the eccentric reversal of the *Collected Books* would not do; nor am I convinced chronology trumps Spicer's scheme. I imagine the editors experienced some discomfort with this dilemma. After all, entering the world of Jack Pumpkinhead (ONS xii) gets you in with ghosts and



Jack Spicer in Vancouver, 1965 by Karen Tallman
By kind permission

Magic

Strange, I had words for dinner
Stranger, I had words for dinner
Stranger, strange, do you believe me?

Honestly I had your heart for supper
Honesty has had your heart for supper
Honesty honestly are your pain.

I burned the bones of it
And the letters of it
And the numbers of it
That go 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
And so far.

Stranger, I had bones for dinner
Stranger, I had bones for dinner
Stranger, stranger, strange, did you believe me?
(mv 264)

As an aside, we know that Spicer was a student of Tarot — was he an actual magician? Blaser thought not. About Spicer's legendary 1957 Magic Workshop in poetry, he wrote:

For all the magical interest of the workshop, magic, it became clear, was a matter of disturbance, entrance and passion, rather than abracadabra. Jack once commented that there was no good source from which to learn magic; it was something we did among ourselves. What I have called a movement and reopening of the real. Nothing must stop. (CB 353)

To return to the passage where Spicer announced the break with the past — “The [early] poems belong nowhere. . . pointing nowhere, as meaningless as sex in a Turkish bath” — the implication is that the mature works, the Books, do point somewhere, and that Spicer's work does belong somewhere.

Spicer's innovations of dictation and seriality are not without precedent, but the degree of his involvement with poetics — “the conceptual space wherein poetry and philosophy . . . enter into a fruitful and mutually enlightening dialogue” (<http://science.jrank.org/pages/7980/Poetry-Poetics.html>) is unique to my admittedly limited experience. To my mind, a poetics outlines the thinking, the poem enacts it. Spicer followed William Carlos Williams in promoting poetics to a place of privilege alongside the poems, in *After Lorca*, the revolutionary series that began the *Collected Books*. Six letters interspersed through thirty-three poems are addressed to the slain Spanish poet Federico García Lorca. They push the bounds of poetic possibility. The agenda is in the first letter:

Dear Lorca,

These letters are to be as temporary as our poetry is to be permanent. They will establish the bulk, the wastage that my sour-stomached contemporaries demand to help them swallow and digest the pure word. . . (mv 110)

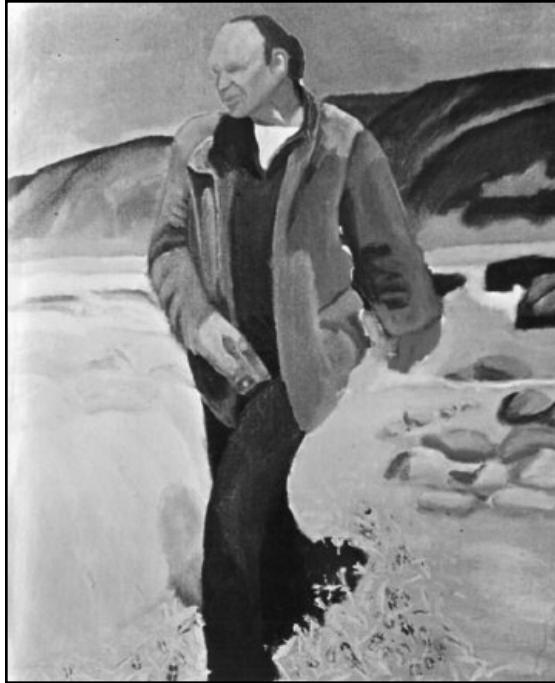
Letters 2 and 3 explore how a poem can compose “the real,” not just reflect a flat and lifeless image of it:

. . . *The imagination pictures the real. I would like to point to the real, disclose it, to make a poem that has no sound in it but the pointing of a finger.* . .

. . . *Things do not connect; they correspond. That is what makes it possible for a poet to translate real objects, to bring them across language as easily as he can bring them across time.* . . (mv 133)

By the time of writing *The Heads of the Town up to the Aether*, poem and poetics fused in the immensely challenging *A Textbook of Poetry*. More accessible is the series of intimate discussions on poetics that Spicer led when on his last legs — three taped by Warren Tallman in Vancouver, the fourth taped at the Berkeley Poetry Conference, transcribed and edited into *The House that Jack Built*. All about dictation and seriality, they can be heard at <http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Spicer.html>.

After Lorca is a tour de force. The poet himself, Lorca, 20 years in the grave, introduces it — mainly to complain that Spicer has messed with his, Lorca's work so



Jack Spicer by Fran Herndon, circa 1963
By kind permission of the artist
(Collection of David Farwell)

much. Poems altered by “inserting or substituting one or two words which completely change the mood and often the meaning of the poem as I had written it.” Poems of Spicer's that incorporate bits of Lorca's poems. Poems “executed in a somewhat fanciful imitation of my early style.” Several poems “written after my death” and sent to Spicer who shuffled them in with the others. Each poem carries a dedication line, “A Translation for ____.” It's an elegant *guessing game*, writes Stan Persky (“After Lorca,” Dooney's Café, 2001) — but surely, if the reader can't tell Spicer's words from Lorca's, and every word is uncertain, it's more than that. *After Lorca* demonstrates “the reversal of language into experience.” Reading is infused with the energy of uncertainty — and in the twining words of two poets, with erotic energy. To parse the details one always has recourse to Clayton Eshleman's study “The Lorca Working” in *boundary 2*.

The last letter evokes a poetic ambition:

It was a game, I shout to myself. A game. There are no angels, ghosts, or even shadows. It was a game made out of summer and freedom and a need for a poetry that would be more than the expression of my hatreds and desires. It was a game like Yeats' spooks or Blake's sexless seraphim. (mv 153)

Poetry that is more than expressions of feeling. Spicer's is interactive, it reaches out, asks the reader to reach in, promises meaning in the engagement. Blaser introduced Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* into his “delination of Jack's importance to poetic thought” to show how the Books resonate with the contemporary but unrelated advances in European metaphysics of the 1960s, but with a wholly American instinct for the primordial. His lead was taken up by critics who marshalled Jacques Derrida and published in *boundary 2*. As the postmodern wave subsided, the thread was dropped. No-one has to my knowledge further tested the claims Blaser made for Spicer's poetics. It has, however, been well served by the biography, the transcribed lectures and now this collected poetry. Is anybody — outside of a small circle of friends — listening?

Thing Language

*This ocean, humiliating in its disguises
Tougher than anything.
No one listens to poetry. The ocean
Does not mean to be listened to. A drop
Or crash of water. It means
Nothing.
It
Is bread and butter
Pepper and salt. The death
That young men hope for. Aimlessly
It pounds the shore. White and aimless signals. No
One listens to poetry.* (mv 373)

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

INTERVIEW WITH ANDREW SCHELLING

Paul Nelson

Interview with Andrew Schelling, poet, scholar, teacher conducted via email, July 16-21, 2009. Andrew Schelling was born January 14, 1953 and raised in New England. He earned his B.A. in Religious Studies from U.C. Santa Cruz in 1973 and joined the faculty of what is now Naropa University in Boulder in 1990. There, in Colorado's Indian Peaks Watershed, he has been engaged in land use and ecology concerns, as well as a being a fine teacher of poetry and Sanskrit. He's also on the faculty of Deer Park Institute in Himachal Pradesh, India. His translations of Sanskrit poetry are well known and his latest book of poetry is *Old Tale Road* from Empty Bowl Press.

PN: Andrew, thanks for this opportunity to pick your brain. Eliot Weinberger's blurb on the back of *Old Tale Road* places you in a poetry tradition that includes the Transcendentalists, Kenneth Rexroth and Gary Snyder. The Transcendentalists, perhaps, because of the interest in metaphysics. Rexroth and Snyder because of being a poet from the West, the wilderness expertise, interest in history and Asian philosophy and writing. Can you elaborate on how important these three influences are to your own work and what other major sources there are for you?

AS: Rexroth and Snyder, yes. Like Thoreau, they taught me to read Asian texts, and to seat the books in the North American landscape. When I began to study Sanskrit—and then to translate India's poetry—those two poets among others kept me on track.

All poets pick and choose the writers that become our personal pantheon or chief influences. I guess that's what's meant by tradition. Thoreau was singular for me as a child. I grew up in the pre-revolutionary townships West of Boston, and would swim in Walden Pond, roam the forests Thoreau knew, and climb his rugged little granite peaks. In fact last year I went to Maine with a couple of friends and climbed Mt. Katahdin (or Ktaadn) in tribute to him. Really it is only Thoreau, not the Transcendentalists, that I keep in my medicine bundle to smoke.

There's also my commitment to wilderness studies, mountaineering, land use issues in the American West, and ecology. I'm always looking for fellow writers who know something about the land they live on, about who lived there before, what the material base is—you know, the geography, plants & animals, weather patterns. Almost all early traditions of song or poetry are steeped in this stuff, before modern urban life reduced such studies to the status of a hobby. Of those older traditions, India has taught me immeasurably, classical Japanese writings, and Native America too.

PN: *Old Tale Road* is your first book in six years. Can you tell us about how a book goes from idea to published work? Was there an idea before the writing started as to how the book would look, or do you go back after a period of time and see how chapters may go together? Is there some central theme, or is it a case when a publisher says *Do you have enough material for a new book?*

AS: Most of my books come about when I have enough material—either poetry or essays or translations—to make a viable collection. My interests, or ways of writing, are consistent enough that I don't worry too much about whether things fit in. I do put a lot of time into looking at how poems fit together. Making a book happens at a different order of concentration than making a poem. But, *Old Tale Road* really holds ten years of work, with many poems originally in the manuscript that I later removed. It had earlier titles too, including *Haibun Black Earth*, *Tundra Poetics*, *High Lonesome*, and then its present title—which by the way is the name of the road I live on. JB Bryan who designed the book found the striking photograph of Newspaper Rock in Utah for the cover, which meets the tone of the book perfectly.

On the other hand I have edited two books—anthologies—that came about

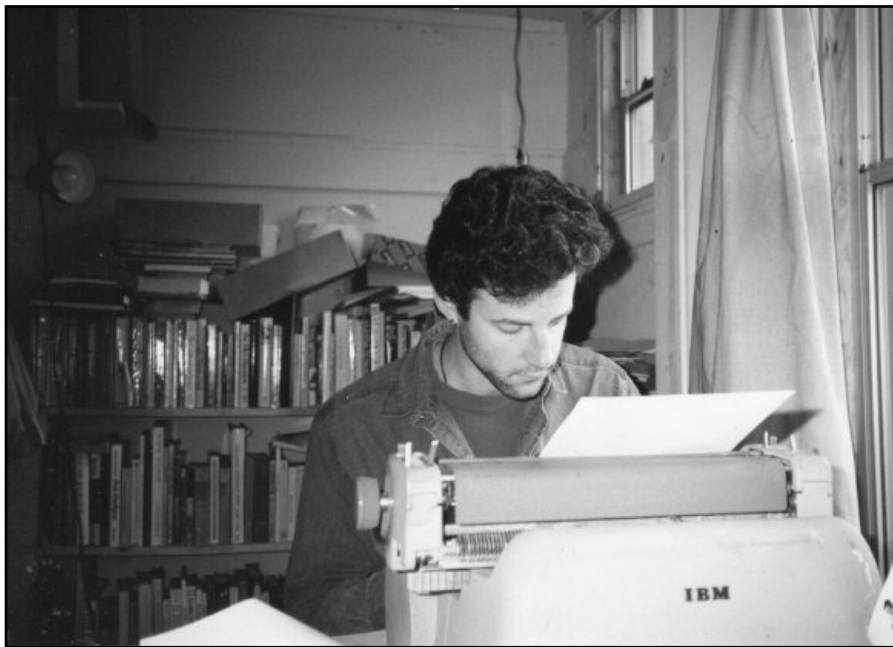
because editors approached me. One is *The Wisdom Anthology of North American Buddhist Poetry*. Wisdom Publications first asked Mike O'Connor if he'd do such a book, and Mike said no, he didn't really think he wanted to, but that there was this character down in Colorado who might be foolish enough to try such a thing. And then recently I finished an anthology of India's *bhakti* or so-called devotional poetry for a press in India that had approached me. Bhakti poems are quite wild, very anti-clerical, sexy, full of trickster material. American readers might know the names of Kabir and Mirabai, two of about forty-five poets included. This book was a very methodical study for me, as I had to learn a pretty wide range of things I knew little about.

PN: Haibun is a form used extensively in *Old Tale Road*. In fact, there is a haibun on the migration of haibun. When did you first come across this form and how did you begin to incorporate that into your writing practice?

A couple of tips of yours on writing haibun include:

Make prose compressed, disjunct, and play at the edge of narrative, don't go into the center of it.

Make the poems weird, ie. so they don't sound too much like haiku.



Andrew Schelling in 1987

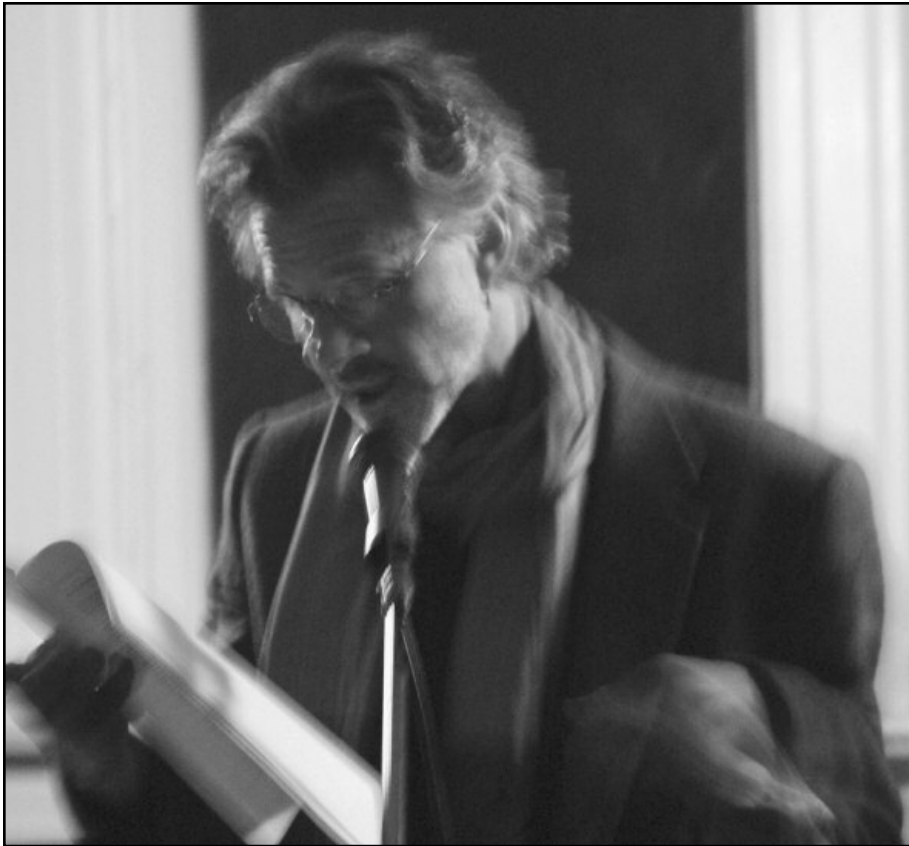
The inclusion of a guy named Kyle provides a bit of disjunction in the aforementioned haibun, as does another, better known (infamous) individual, Donald Rumsfeld. Why do you believe it necessary for well-written haibun to have that disjunct quality and does the poem come out of your head like that organically, or do you need to go back and introduce that in the re-vision process? And is your writing, like Philip Whalen called it, a *picture or graph of the mind moving*?

AS: For many years my writing has come out of my journals. Most of what I keep track of goes in: scraps of verse, prose bits, dreams, notes on books or lectures, recipes, natural history, word origins & definitions, portraits of friends, and so forth. At some point a phrase or a rhythm comes to me, and I will go into my journal and find things to put in a Haibun. I think that as a poet you need to be

a thief—and the best person to steal from is yourself. So keep lots of notes.... My journals are a mix of prose and verse-stanzas anyhow, so making things a little more formal isn't hard. I have also studied Basho & Sei Shonagon, and other Japanese writers who contributed to the form. You can get as deep, as complicated as you want, in your practice of haibun.

But the disjunction is simply the way many of us write today. "A graph of the mind moving." We all know how the mind follows a lot of leads, connections, and pleasures simultaneously. There's a lot of boring modern Haibun that gets written, stunted by the writer's belief that it should be a simple unified narrative. Our lives luckily don't work that way. My problem's the opposite! My stuff always begins with a half dozen things going on, and any revision I do is to find my way back to the first impulse, to that original rhythm or image.

PN: The link in "Haibun the Migration of Haibun" is the Japanese poetic form (haibun), and your region of the country where WWII Internment camps held U.S. Americans of Japanese ancestry. The thread between these facets is Asian metaphysics with the found poem from the Dalai Lama. So, the history and bioregional aspects of your work and life all come up into this one example. Two of the most important thrusts of post-modern North American poetry in my view, are the interest in history (*Paterson*, *The Maximus Poems*, &c.) and that sense of place exemplified by those two works. But do you believe a bioregionalist sensibility takes these concepts further?



Andrew Schelling reading at the Monkey Puzzle event in 2009

AS: I hadn't quite thought of those two poems as early bioregional writings. Williams and Olson were both largely interested in the social, political, economic conditions of the Euro-American settlers who built their cities. Olson did try to go beneath the underpinnings. He knew the fishing industry, and he got on to the Vinland sagas that document Norse explorers reaching Massachusetts. Weirdly though, he could never accept real cultural discoveries on this continent before the Old World got in. His *Mayan Letters* is painful to read; he can't believe that indigenous people had astronomy and shipping, or could build observatories and pyramids. He thought it had to be seafaring Phoenicians.

I guess a bioregional awareness is studied, skeptical, and also quite pragmatic. It suggests a regional and anarchist approach to politics, local organizing, and ultimately a vision of reestablishing communities based on natural boundaries, not political ones that ignore local conditions. There's a loose version of it getting very fashionable now, with the global economy in a downspin. Many people are being forced to think more progressively, support local growers, understand the way the big machine has decimated their neighborhoods & back yards, drive less, reconsider their school systems. For the moment it looks like old-fashioned community values are enjoying a resurgence. This might mean that we'll look at big poems with global ambitions more skeptically in the future.

PN: You told me that Mike O'Connor, the publisher of *Old Tale Road*, says the Perfect Wisdom Suite is heart of the book, but you say: "It must have at least two then—as the Noh play on Jaime de Angulo is the single piece I would want to outlive me." Can you elaborate?

AS: Jaime de Angulo is a West Coast culture hero, and one of the writers close to my heart. This loops back to your first question, about influences. De Angulo was a linguist, ethnographer, kind of a literary man, but behind that he was a scout into older ways of living. He spent time with a number of "doctors" among the California tribes, and knew a great deal about the Indians of northern California, especially their languages, songs, and old time stories. "The Camp at El Mocho" is a Noh play that takes him for its *shite* or central figure. Certain Japanese Noh plays use historical people that way. There are several Noh composed around the poetess Ono no Komachi, for instance. Noh are quite stylized—with exacting use of sets, characters, musicians, and chorus. They have an overlay of Buddhist metaphysics, but underneath lies a concern with old medicine and magical healing practices.

There was a particular healing that I hoped to bring about a few years back. I'd been studying Jaime de Angulo's writings since the late 1970s, and the El Mocho piece formed itself around him. For a long time I have hoped to write on de Angulo. Maybe the Noh play is that book. Maybe there's another in the wings.

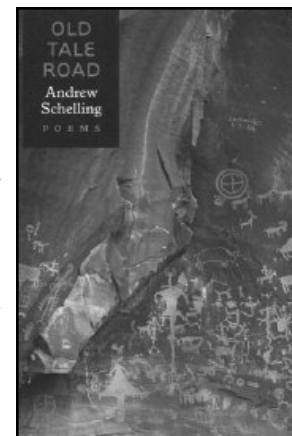
PN: There is much from your essay *Post-Coyote Poetry* that I could ask about, but the

two things most critical, for my interests are, first, the notion that this kind of poetry has projectivist tendencies and, second, that this is a poetry of western North America. Rexroth has said on many occasions that West Coast poets are more influenced by Asian culture than European culture. How does that differentiate the poetry of the west from that of other regions of the continent?

AS: I live in Colorado, right where the short grass prairie meets the eastern slope of the Southern Rocky Mountains. It is a rough, comparatively unformed place, culturally speaking, and does not yet show a settled, recognizable approach to the arts or even to life ways. Most of the high-tech industry, the ghastly condominium developments—which have business centers but no schools or grocery stores—are pretty much in the same old cut-and-run mode as mining towns were. Places to do extraction work but not to live. They will end up ghost towns probably, and I doubt they will leave any worthwhile poetry. My spiritual homeland, where I learnt to think as a poet, where I entered a community that went to the wilderness, to anarchist politics, and to Asian poetics for sustenance, is Northern California. There you look out across the Pacific at Asia, and many of the life ways are shared around the North Pacific Rim.

When I coined the term "post coyote poets" I wanted to evoke an anarchic, rangy, non-academic but studious set of poets who share certain tendencies. Knowledge of Asian languages and literatures, wilderness expertise, respect for Native American knowledge about the land, a gift-exchange system of publishing. Post coyote was meant to be funny. It also refers to *Coyote's Journal*, the publication that looks to me to have best captured the internationalism, the interest in translation, the concern with world cultures and local cultures, which characterize these poets. In particular, I see the current University based poets as having lost interest in the wider range of world poetry, including oral forms. So I wanted to point to poets who write in relation to what ecologists call "deep time."

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



Old Tale Road
Andrew Schelling
Empty Bowl Press
2008, 105 pages
\$15.00 US



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Poetry and art
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Scarecrow

poetry & art by
Duncan Regehr

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

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

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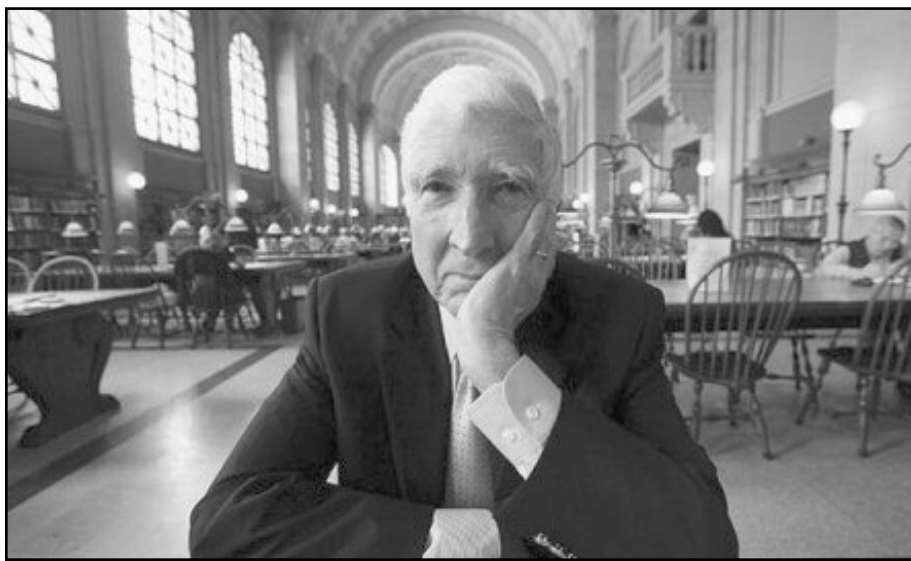
FINAL POEMS AND STORIES ABOUT THE END OF LIFE

Eric Spalding

I've been reading John Updike since my teens. At the time, there were books of his at home because my father liked him. *Rabbit Run*, *The Centaur*, *Rabbit Redux* – I still have very fond memories of these novels and others. Since then, I have kept on reading Updike's works. I don't admire everything he's written, but I've always felt that reading a book of his every couple of years was like reuniting with a particularly open and thoughtful friend. So when he passed away in January 2009, I experienced a loss. There would be no more annual dispatches from him, as he was not an author likely to leave incomplete manuscripts lying around.

I was wrong on at least two counts, because I have read two books published since his passing, *My Father's Tears and Other Stories* and *Endpoint and Other Poems*, which compile his final short works in book form. Updike was insightful to the very end. Some of the fiction in *My Father's Tears* is as good as it gets in terms of the realistic, carefully observed stories of middle-class suburban life that were his forte. My three favorites in that collection are "Free", "The Accelerating Expansion of the Universe" and "Outage".

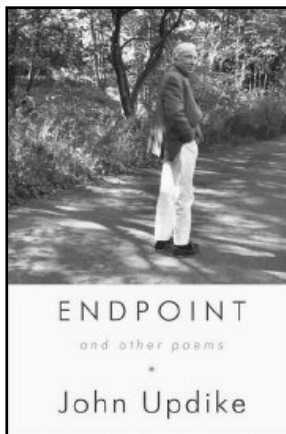
As for Updike's poetry, my tendency had been to overlook it because I had thought of it as a mere side project for him. But I was attracted to *Endpoint* through a kind of gloomy voyeurism. I came across excerpts from the title poem in *The New Yorker*, and I was fascinated by them. Through the characters in his novels and stories, Updike frequently revealed deeply private aspects of everyday life, and given the autobiographical nature of many of his books, I found it easy to think of him as personally opening himself up to the reader. Indeed, in his memoirs, *Self-Consciousness*, he went one step further, confiding intimate facets of his life without the cover of fiction. In that book, the chapter on his lifelong struggle with psoriasis was an affecting example of this confessional approach.



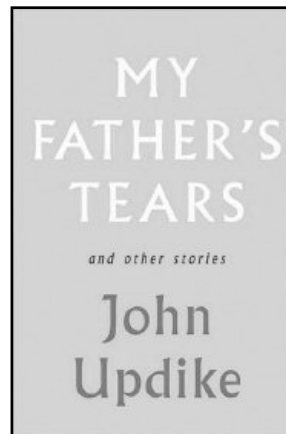
John Updike

In the long poem "Endpoint", Updike went so far as to reflect on his own impending death. Indeed, he wrote the last part of the work while he was in palliative care:

*I had a fear of falling – airplanes
spilling their spinning contents like black beans (...).
I'm safe! Away with travel and abrupt
perspectives! Terra firma is my ground,
my refuge, and my certain destination.
My terrors – the flight through dazzling air, with
the blinding smash, the final black – will be
achieved from thirty inches, on a bed. (p. 25)*



Endpoint and Other Poems
John Updike
(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009)
98 pages



My Father's Tears and Other Stories
John Updike
(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009)
304 pages

There may be other instances where an author writes about his own imminent demise, but I don't know of any. As a fan reading these lines, I was divided. I wanted to say, "Let it go, you don't have to keep on writing on your deathbed." But I was also thinking, "Thank you for the gift of these final reflections."

Endpoint and Other Poems is a slender book, divided into four sections: "Endpoint," "Other Poems," "Sonnets" and "Light and Personal." The ten poems in the fourth section are distinguished by the fact that for the most part, unlike the rest of the poems in the collection, they rhyme and they deal with specific incidents or occasions that Updike wanted to commemorate.

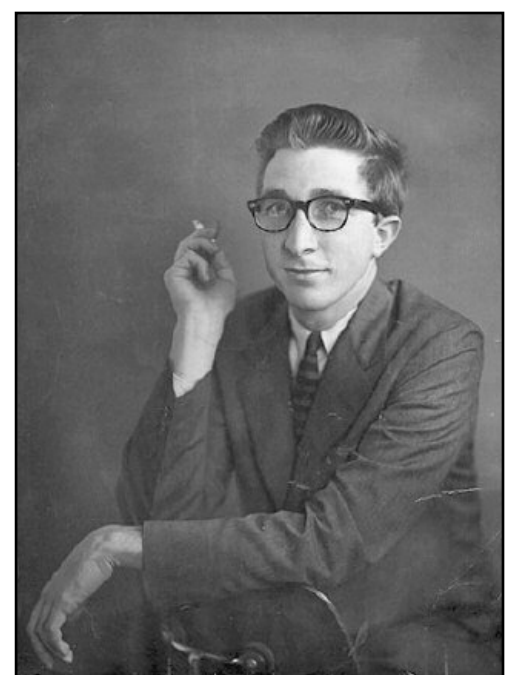
The other poems in *Endpoint*, like the stories in *My Father's Tears*, deal with a variety of topics, but they return over and over again to end-of-life issues. In some of them, Updike takes a critical look at his own aging self. For instance, in "Endpoint" again, he describes his own right hand and how rugged and blotchy it's become. Further on in the poem, he observes a wizened old man in the mirror, and recognizes the reflection as his own:

*After a Tucson movie, some man in
the men's room mirror lunged toward me
with wild small eyes, white hair, and wattled neck –
who could he be, so hostile and so weird,
so due for disposal, like a popcorn bag
vile with its inner film of stale, used grease?
Where was the freckled boy who used to peek
into the front-hall mirror, off to school? (p. 18)*

I'm not a connoisseur of poetry, and I have the impression that people who know poetry look down upon Updike as a dilettante who merely dabbled in the form, like the pop singer who tries acting. Also, *Endpoint* is easy to follow, which may be another mark against it. Indeed, most of the time, I felt that I could read through the form of a poem directly to its central meaning; the poems, while beautiful in their style and imagery, were not hard to understand. Moreover, even though their focus was often days gone by and aging, they were seldom dark or depressing in a Philip Larkin way. I even found one poem about the end to be divertingamusing: in it, Updike describes a computer of his that has gone senile in its old age and has to be turned off for good.

In these final poems, Updike is his usual self, dispassionately observing in minute detail whatever he's commenting on, no matter how morbid the subject. Even on his deathbed, he appears to accept his fate, bravely conveying his impressions in a detached manner. I doubt that there will be any more new writings from this author, but he leaves behind a wealth of works. At my rate, I don't think I'll ever be able to catch up on everything he wrote even if I live to be ninety.

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



John Updike in 1962 (photo: W. Earl Snyder)

THE PERSISTENCE OF DESIRE: WHAT UPDIKE MEANT

Richard Wirick

This is, of course, the name of one of his stories. In it, a man who has escaped his farm town past, a rustic with urban vanities, nonetheless returns there to visit a trusted dentist. He sees the things that have changed since his childhood visits, the most telling being a digit-based (though not *digital*) clock, its minutes dropping away, as he watches, “into the brimming void.”

What has not changed is his passion for a childhood flame who happens to drop by the office, chat him up a bit, blush under his revived attentions, and eventually, almost silently, alludes to the anomies her marriage there has doomed her to. Though his themes are as abundant as Adam’s names, persistence is Updike’s perpetual character-driver, the life force that animates each form of his characters’ transcendence:

[Janet] arose and came against his chest, and Clyde, included in the close aroma her hair and skin gave off, felt weak and broad and grand, like a declining rose. Janet tucked a folded note into the pocket of his shirt and said conversationally, “He’s waiting outside in the car.”

The neutral, ominous “he” opened wide a conspiracy Clyde instantly entered. He stayed behind a minute, to give her time to get away. Ringed by judging eyes of the young and old, he felt like an actor snug behind the blinding protection of the footlights; he squinted prolongedly at the speedometer-clock, which, like a letter delivered on the stage, was blank.

And who wrote better about abiding religiosity, the search for faith that Updike saw as essential and unexplainable by reference to historical or social forces? In the story “The Man Who Loved Extinct Animals,” the protagonist sees in the joints and hinges of the fossils he assembles the delicate bridges that the mind builds over the abyss. The brimming void may blind us, he seems to say, but as long as we rivet the beams together, keep busy with the reality or the illusion of building and don’t look down, we will be fine for the time being.

Persistence also abides, though less than in other writers, in those characters who shore up some art, or artifact, against their ruin. One of the most powerful of “The Olinger Stories” (Collected in 2004’s *Collected Early Stories*), is “The Alligators.” An elementary school boy fashions his first illustrations not out of any transcendent wish, but to satirize a classmate whose ostracism is a requirement for popularity. He feels guilt at creating for such a mean and limited purpose, but then, as he shares other, maturing drawings with friends, sees that he has inherited a transfiguring power, and one conferring the consolations of infinity.

What often persists the most could be the most unattractive but necessary of qualities—market ambition, social climbing, the Sinclair Lewis hucksterism that tells us the historical echoes of the “Rabbit” nickname. In the story “The City,” a man falls ill while traveling on business, and as he recovers through hallucinations and incisional pain, we think that maybe he will reassess, prioritize, hunger for the stasis of a family and fixed life. But the desire to impress and dazzle is as basic to the organism as eating or breathing, and the brush with death seems to have taught him nothing but the need for reserves of energy stored up by rest. It was always Updike’s exploration of ambition that made him that most American of writers. Roth and Bellow approached it brilliantly through urbanized *machers* of immigrant merchant classes, but Updike filtered it through our Rotary Club speakers, the Toyota salesman (*Rabbit Is Rich*) quoting gas mileage stats to us from *Consumer Reports*.

Perhaps the greatest persistence he portrayed was longing itself; yearning, the desire to rise higher and keep hope borne up in one’s bearing as the very badge of existence. Like Francis Bacon, Updike believed the world is laid out for us, kindly disposed to our discovery and enjoyment: “Full of Joye and Wondrous Goode.” That transporting, almost erotic elixir of exploration runs through the age-sequenced life snapshots of the narrator of “Museums and Women.” It first visits him like a spell as

he traverses a county reliquary with his mother:

Who she was was a mystery so deep it never formed itself into a question. She had descended to me from thin clouds of preexistent time, enveloped me, and set me moving toward an unseen goal with a vague expectation that in the beginning was more hers than mine. She was not content. I felt that the motion that brought us again and again to the museum was an agitated one, that she was pointing me through these corridors toward a radiant place that she had despaired of reaching . . . I was her son and the center of her expectations. I dutifully absorbed the light-struck terror of the hushed high ceilings and went through each doorway with a kind of timid rapacity.

What is sought here—though great—is not as important as the *sensation*, the very texture of seeking: *she was pointing me . . . toward a radiant place she had despaired of reaching*. Updike owns the luxuriance of *The Search* more than anyone (perhaps excepting Walker Percy) in modern letters: he invented the theme out of whole cloth and then perfected it in more than fifty books, through hundreds of characters. His perspective on it was tactile, limber, instinctual, breezy, and at the same

time solemn, like one of his epistolary clergymen. William Pritchard said of him, reviewing the collection with the above story as its title: “He is a religious writer, he is a comic realist; he knows what everything feels like, how everything works. He is putting together a body of work which, in substantial intelligent creation, will eventually be seen as second to none in our time.” Eventually seen? For those in the know, the fathomless depth, and the *dexterity*, was staggeringly obvious from the start. Chip McGrath, in his tribute in *The Times*, posed the question: “If you could write that well by taking a pill, who wouldn’t swallow whole fistfuls of them?”

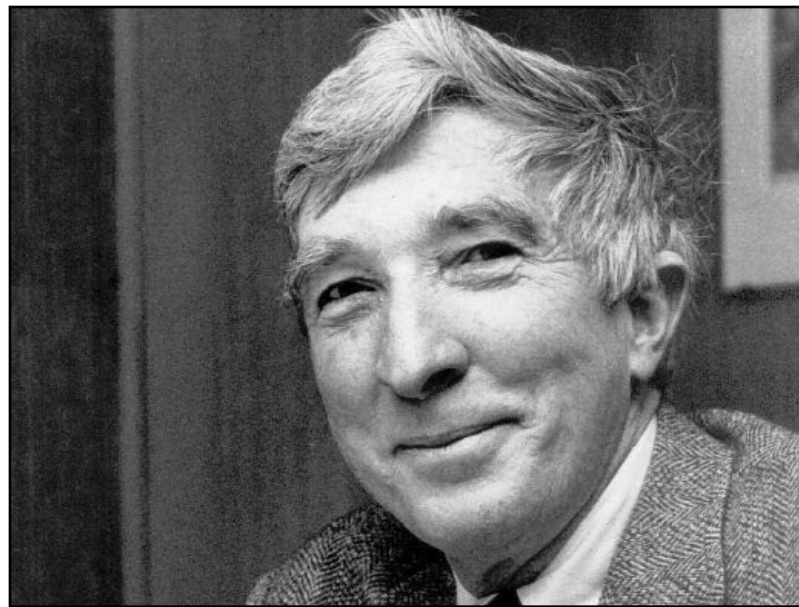
Though we had no way of knowing it, my colleague Victoria Pynchon and I saw him in his very last public appearance, at UCLA’s Royce Hall in December. He read a quick passage from *The Widows of Eastwick*, where Alexandra, the aging Rhode Island witch of the Seventies, is now an old

woman on a Nile cruise, telepathically electrocuting bats that are flying across her steamer bow and mussing her hair. Everything you could want in establishing a scene is there: the colors of the foul but suddenly clearing river, the Monet hues of the Egyptian twilight, the precisely rendered sound of something we’ll never hear but know could sound *only that way* were we to witness it—a bat’s fur and rubbery extremities flaming up and then dousing themselves to death in the water.

Wrapped up in this sensuous music—much as with his beloved Proust and Bellow—is the effortless, sudden ranging between third person and first, the immediately recognizable hinges of his free indirect style. It is what hit American readers of *Rabbit, Run* like a thunderbolt in 1959, or like the welcome sun Harry sees on the first page, sliding open the door of his dark, Satanic linotype shop and blinking at the kindly-disposed world, the bright, haphazard gravel under the soles of his basketball hi-tops. It was the same shifts in register and perspective that made you always know but never care which thought was Rabbit’s or which was his creator’s. He dove like a . . . what? Like a bat—down into everyone’s head and hovered there meticulously. He got out of them just what was needed for reality to create their observations and then, with a pirouette Sam Tannenhause called “pure magic,” let his characters’ minds in turn press out upon the world their seeing had reconstituted.

He honed this to perfection in the opening scenes of *Rabbit At Rest*, where the narrator jumps inside Rabbit (he’s waiting for his wife to get out of the bathroom at the Ft. Myers airport) long enough for us to feel the man’s gluttonous elation, then leaps back to look at his character like a Babbitesque, portly clodhopper, chewing and dribbling a candy bar, gazing at his own strange sunstruck extinction:

(continued on page 40)



John Updike

A LONGING FOR THE LIGHT

Hannah Main-van der Kamp

Suppose a reader, unfamiliar with Aleixandre or any Spanish poetry, who picks up this volume and turns to ...

*Solitude flashes in a loveless world.
Life is a bright crust,
a rugged fixed skin
where a man can find no rest,
however much he applies his sleep to a darkened star*

* * *

Vicente Aleixandre was born just before 1900 and died in 1984. Not counting his collected works, twelve volumes of his poems were published in Spain between 1928 and 1974. Though born in Sevilla, his formative years were spent in Malaga. He was regarded by many as Spain's most remarkable poet of the 20th century. A member of the famed "generation of 27" that included Lorca and Alberti, his work was heavily influenced by Neruda. In the groundbreaking *Modern European Poetry*, published in 1966, (a first introduction to contemporary poetics of the Continent for many North American readers), Willis Barnstone, the editor, says of Aleixandre that "though difficult,... he is considered Spain's most remarkable poet."

He published nothing between 1939 and 1949 because writing was banned for a decade after the Civil war but Vicente was not a political poet. He was known to have Republican sympathies but was ill in the late thirties and convalescing in a mountain village. In 1977, Aleixandre received the Nobel Prize for literature.

Is any of this a necessary prelude to the appreciation of these poems? Most readers of poetry in English avoid poetry in translation. It is as if there is a wall between cultures and translation cannot leap over it. One feels a need for a guide, an explicator, a quick set of annotations as a key to the gate.

The theme of longing is common in the poetry of Spain; also death and light, memory and sadness, blood, moon and loneliness. And always the sea.

Aleixandre continuously developed his style. Reading through this collection, it is impossible to determine exactly which poems were taken from which of his titles though a series of phases appear chronologically.

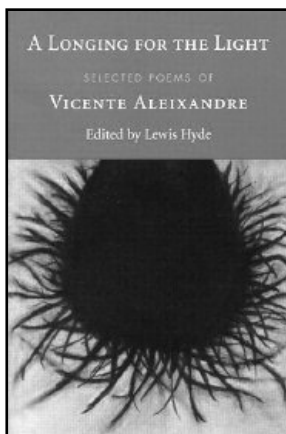
His development as an artist bears similarities to that of his compatriot Picasso who was born in Malaga. They were the about same age and both reacted against the conventional values of bourgeois, upper middleclass urban Spain. Like Picasso, Aleixandre went through a "pink phase". *La Historia del Corazon*, written between 1945 and 1953, published in 1954, marked a shift from his despairing tone. He found a social, talky narrative style. The poems became more outward, exploring the world of people. "On the Way to School" is in the voice of a boy exhilarated by the everyday world around him as he rides his bike to class and experiences himself as a butterfly.

*"I remember perfectly
how I folded my wings mysteriously on the very threshold of the school."*

In another piece, the whole class falls asleep, even the teacher, in an intoxicating fragrant haze. He also wrote poems to his dog. The poems about death began to be more personal and affecting. In "My Grandfather's Death", the boy while seated beside the dying man in a room, goes off fishing with him in his imagination. .

He read the Surrealist Manifesto in 1928 and readily declared the influence on his earlier work but Aleixandre never considered himself a true surrealist. In his brief introduction, Lewis Hyde remarks that Aleixandre was never really in touch with that "other world" in a nourishing way. Though the poets of his generation were pulled by the interior world, "the strong undertow beneath the accelerating tide of rationalism", Hyde asserts that Aleixandre only dimly perceived what it meant "to go down there."

Aleixandre was an educated man; for a time, he taught Law. It must have been a psycho/spiritual release of enormous proportions to write his surrealist second book *Pasión de la Tierra*, published in 1929. He said about it, "It is the hardest book of mine



A Longing for the Light
Vicente Aleixandre
Edited by Lewis Hyde
Copper Canyon Press
second edition, 2007
279 pp, \$18 US

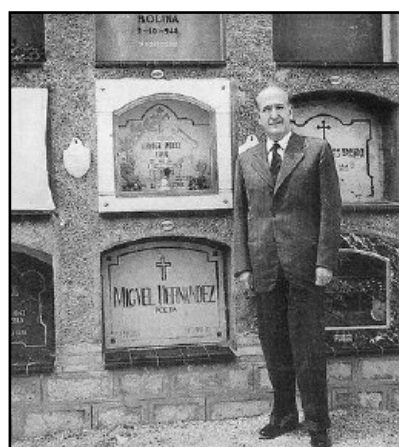


Vicente Aleixandre

to read. I have always thought I could see in its chasm-like layers the sudden start of my poetry's evolution, which, from the earliest, has been a longing for the light. This book has therefore produced in me a double complicated feeling: of aversion because of its difficulty, which contradicts the call and the appeal it makes to basic levels, common to all of us." Three long prose poems from *Pasión* are included in *Longing* and though they can be appreciated for their historical import, they do seem very dated now. The plethora of unrelated images and expressions in each poem cause them to meld into each other; none are distinct, none are memorable. But perhaps that is hindsight; it is almost impossible to recreate another person's liberation, especially after eighty years.

Though he later moved to Madrid, Aleixandre's most impressionable years were spent on the Andalusian coast. This is evident in his exquisite sea poems.

One could argue that he wrote in the native *lingua* of Andalusia. That *autonomía* has been branded as surreal but is not. The bulls, the dark alleys, the heat, the ancient family feuds; these are real. It was the cultivated artifice of manners and urban wealth that were surreal. Starkness and strangeness characterize this geo-cultural region. Atavistic, and fatalistic, it is profoundly influenced by seven centuries of



Vicente Aleixandre

Islamic culture. Witness the tenderness with which violent religious iconography is addressed. The wailing of the gypsy *cantores*, the thousands of acres of *maque* (foraging goat-despoiled land), the seemingly endless rolling hills of olive groves, the dangers inherent in fishermen's lives; all these and much more are threaded through Aleixandre's work. One could not mistake his work for anything but the poetics of southern Spain.

The poverty, bleakness and remoteness of that area in his time were legendary. Even Franco was afraid of the violence and anarchism of the Andalusians and tried to bring more prosperity to the area in order to avert unrest. Look at early photographs of the vil-

lages around Sevilla, when Vicente was a young man, and you might mistake them for illustration of agricultural feudal life, which it was. Malaga, when Vicente was a teen, had not yet been discovered as the Costa del Sol. It was a small rough port town, known for its sweet wines, raisin trade and seafood. The violence perpetrated by both sides there during the Civil War is still a forbidden memory.

He was not a Lorca. Not for him the hysterical faints, the bloody thighs and the dark angels. He was an intellectual given to reflection, trying to think his way out of linear precision. It accounts for the tension in his work and also for his falling into illness repeatedly until he gave up being a Law professor. His duende was more cerebral,

sadness and longing in the abstract, not actual melon breasts and crying guitars.

The poet wrote brief prefaces to his books and some of them are included in this collection. His own statements are opaque to a frustrating degree. One of many examples is this paragraph about *Poemas de la Consumacion* (Poems of Ripeness) published in 1968, “In this book I felt it necessary to use irrational elements in the poems but without having this entail an unnecessary return to those forms of expression already used in my surrealist stage. I tried, therefore, to irrationalize the expressive element out of the experience of realism, if I may use that imprecise word.” Well, poets do not have to explain. It may also be a poor translation or the poet’s formal Spanish (remember he was born just at the end of the 19th century) or it is more likely that he deliberately obfuscates because he prefers that the reader enter the poems without a craving for clarity.

This particular bilingual collection, first published in 1979 and re-issued by Copper Canyon in 2007, is based on *Obras Completas* of 1961. The translators include Hyde, WS Merwin and Robert Bly as well as others. Bly’s work seems particularly felicitous. Is this because Bly’s habit is to make new poems from transliterations that he commissions from native speakers rather than translate?

“It’s Raining”

*This evening it’s raining, and my picture of you is raining.
The day falls open in my memory. You walked in.
I can’t hear. Memory gives me nothing but your picture.
There only your kiss or the rain is falling.
Your voice is raining, your sad kiss is raining,
the deep kiss,
the kiss soaked with rain. Lips are moist.
Moist with its memories the kiss weeps
from some delicate
gray heavens.
Rain falls from your love, dampening my memory,
keeps on falling. The kiss
falls far down. The gray rain
goes on falling.*

It’s fortunate to be able to read these poems in two languages side by side because Vicente is a difficult poet and the Spanish words add much needed evocative clues. His work is hermetic. Like all dream language poetry, there is no benefit in attempting to make explications. His aim was to write “poetry as it is born.”

Aleixandre endeavoured to leave behind the stilted, self-conscious language of the establishment and to revive a romanticism that, tinged with surrealism, gives voice to the undercurrents.

As an old man, he compares himself to Moses.

*Because like Moses, he dies.
Not with the useless tablets and the chisel and the lightning in the mountains
but with words broken on the ground, his hair
on fire, his ears singed by the terrifying words.
And the breath is still in his eyes and the spark in his lungs
and his mouth is full of light.*

He was never sentimental. If one virtue permeates his work it is dignified gravity. “A sunset is sufficient for death./ A serving of shadow on the edge of the horizon.” Towards the end of his writing life, more than ever, his poems were about aging and death. The contrast between the young and the old is a recurrent theme. Anyone who has strolled a Spanish *paseo* at dusk will not find it difficult to envision this poem, (translated by Lewis Hyde)

“Los Viejos y Los Jovenes” (*The Old and the Young*)

*People walk by, young ones. There they go, one after
another,
removed from the glorious evening that rubs them with its
oil.
Like those old people
who move more slowly, harnessed
to the last ray of the sun in the west.
The old are well aware of the coolness of this clear evening.
The sun, thinned out, touches them and they take in
its mildness: it’s a blessing - so few are left! -*

Aguá del mar

*Aguá del mar, ¿quién la siente?
¿quién la ha visto; quién la sabe?
¿quién descifrará la clave
de la sal, clarividente?
Nunca espuma o labio ardiente.
Amarga sombra sin sueño.
Tenaz, derrotado empeño
de una sangre trastornada,
vertida sangre estrellada,
loza y triste de su dueño.*

(Inédito) (1940)

Vicente Aleixandre

An autographed manuscript page

and they move slowly along the bright path.

*It is the early season’s first flush of green.
The young river – more like the childhood of a nearby spring
and the foliage about to break: tender oaks,
a forest rising lightly toward the mountain pass.
So lightly! But the old no longer move at that pace.
And over there, the young, taking the lead, go past them
without seeing, they move on and don’t look back.
The old folks watch them. They’re steady,
these people who, at the far side of life,
at the edge of the end, hang on
without falling, that way forever.
While the young shadows go past, so unstable, using
themselves up,
Driven by the thirst that one gust of air will satisfy.*

* * *

Suppose a tourist who enters one of the great architectural edifices of southern Spain: the great Mosque of Cordoba, the Cathedral of Sevilla or the Alhambra in Granada. Without a guidebook or a tour guide or any knowledge of the history of the place, how would one begin to look? First, one needs to recover from the moment of panic in front of the unknown without an informant. Slowly, aspects of the edifice begin to reveal themselves. This tourist does not yet have words or explanations, only hesitation and questions. Walking and pondering, open to surprise while relinquishing defenses, slowly the tourist gains a connection, an opening, and a resonance. Then a blank wall of incomprehension follows, then the traveler moves on, finds another point of lit up “aha”. And so on.

So it is with a reader who opens a page of Aleixandre for the first time. All great art, whether poetry or sculpture or song, speaks for itself. It needs no introduction. The best way to travel in *Una Aspiración a la Luz* is to trust oneself to the process even when it is bewildering. Read/look again, repeat. The subtext of longing will linger long after the book is closed.

Hannah Main – van der Kamp, reviewer and poet, lives most of the year on the B C coast near Lund. She has lived in southern Spain and is working on “Marevillas del Sur”, a collection of poems about Andalucía,

DROPPING THE BOW: POEMS OF ANCIENT INDIA

Gregory Dunne

Once again, White Pine Press (Buffalo, N.Y.) offers us an astonishing collection of poetry in translation from the ancients. This collection, masterfully translated by Andrew Schelling, is a re-issue of an earlier text originally brought out in 1991 by Broken Moon Press (Seattle), a notable Pacific Rim Publisher of Asian poetry in translation that ceased its publication activities ten years ago. This new edition includes a Preface, seventeen new poems, and a section of notes on the poets. It retains its original helpful *Afterword*, which speaks to the work of translation and the delight found working with Sanskrit. The book comprises the 15th volume in White Pine's *Companion for the Journey's Series*, a series that keeps in print some of the best works of Asian poetry we have in translation. The books are all small in design and easily portable thus making them both metaphorically and literally easy companions for any journey. This particular book is clearly one we want to have in print and circulating. *Dropping The Bow* was awarded the prestigious Academy of American Poets award for translation in 1992 when it was first released. The new additions that Schelling has made to the original text serve to strengthen it and insure its place as a modern classic in translation.

These poems are old, belonging to a tradition "that emerged two thousand years ago" yet like all great poetry they continue to sing to us with qualities of freshness and clarity that readers will find irresistible. "The bulk of the poems," Schelling relates, "are love songs. Their eroticism is playful and heartbreaking, and utterly refined." They are poems of the heart – a heart that shows itself to be as complex and varied, as capricious and steady, as the hearts of men and women today. The poems ring true to the ear, are *true*, as well as fresh. In one poem, for example, a woman wonders to herself what she can say to a departing lover that would be right and satisfying. She goes through the possible options, sounding them out, testing them. There is something essentially true to the workings of the human heart in this poem. True, also, is the poem's acknowledgment of the limits of language to express feeling. The poem could have been written this morning. Despite a thousand years, we know this human heart is our heart.

Don't go!
brings bad luck.
Leave! Is an oily
word and sounds hollow.
Stay! Just a futile command.
Do what you like,
pretends I'm indifferent
but, I can't live without you,
really doesn't apply.
What should I say
when you pull on your trousers
and get up to leave?

~ Anonymous

Although the poems are refined and delicate in their way, there is also an earthy quality to them that can at times remind one of the variety of emotions found in the Blues music. Schelling speaks of "rasa" as being the key concept found in early Sanskrit poetry: "an archaic word that meant sap, juice, fluid, semen." Later, the word came to mean "essence, flavor, the core of experience; and eventually, the permanent emotions that bring a work of art to life." The poems brim with the "permanent emotions" of life. We find the full range of emotions expressed in the poems. Sanskrit poets recognized eight rasas, Schelling tells us: "erotic, comic, grievous, angry, heroic, fearsome, odious, marvelous. A good poet worked them all." In this collection, some poems sing of passionate devotion – praise – while others sing of loss and betrayal. All



Dropping The Bow:
Poems of Ancient India
Translated by Andrew
Schelling
White Pine Press,
Buffalo, New York
122 Pages. \$15.00 U.S.

are richly evocative in sensual detail. These are poems to bath one's senses in. What comes across is a symphony for the heart and for the sensual world we too briefly know. The fact that these poems speak to us across great distance and time, culturally and historically, and often anonymously, makes them the more poignant – hard not to read these poems and feel close to these people brimming with life and not simultaneously reflect on the reality of their already having gone to dust. So much life in the face of death then and the constant wisdom of their songs to savor life and know its goodness while we can.

These ancient Sanskrit poems, in the hands of a master translator like Schelling, fly through time like arrows of the Eros. The music of poetry is here to be enjoyed and savored. He gets the pressure to fall on the closing word of the poem below just right to produce a resonant finish:

Only
the swollen waters
of Godavari River
and the nights and midnights of rain
have seen
his good luck
and my
unladylike
daring

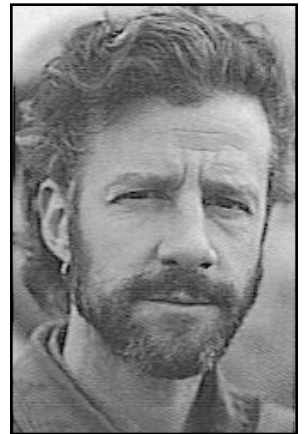
~ Makaradhvaja

In another poem, we see the evocation of the sensual world in conversation with the thoughts a woman as the poem sings of her longing and desire – her will for refuge and love.

Dense downhanging branches,
shade on the riverbank,
dew on the wind –
O Murala River –
clear sand,
whistling waterbirds,
who made your
willows such refuge,
a married woman could
come here for love,
undetected. . .

~ Vidya

Vidya, whose poem is sighted above, is one of the great wonders of this collection. Fortunately, Schelling decided to include a number of poems from this 7th century poet "who wrote freely and convincingly of love outside the conventions of marriage, with a uniquely tender good humor." One can only wonder what marriage for women was like in 7th century India. We know it came exceedingly early and marriages were often polygamous. Easy to imagine many women would find themselves in less than satisfying arrangements. In his *Afterword*, Schelling provides more information on this "bold and untamable" poet: "Today she has no reputation beyond a circle of Sanskrit specialists, and I have included a disproportionate number of her poems because they stand with the best poetry from ancient Greece, China, or Japan. Vidya's peers are Sappho, Li Ch'ing Chao, and Lady Komachi, yet her poems lie scattered through a number of anthologies: no one has bothered to collect them." With peers such as this, and with poetry as engaging as hers is, readers have something wonderful indeed to experience in this volume:



Andrew Schelling



Kamadeva and the goddess Rati

What wealth,
that you can chatter
about a night spent
with your lover –
the teasings,
smiles, whispered words –
even his special smell.
Because, O my friends I swear –
from the moment
my lover's hand touched
my skirt, I remember
nothing at all.

~ Vidya

The collection is not limited to the celebrating of a merely romantic and youthful sort of love. It celebrates love, or the human longing for fulfillment in love, from a variety of perspectives and forms. It begins with love songs that might be attributed to youth and progresses to include poems in the voice of older lovers. We have poems that speak delicately of a bride's confidence in her youthful beauty. She "struts" past her co-wives without the adornment of expensive jewelry. She wears in her hair only a peacock feather, tellingly "thrust" there. Her beauty requires no other accessories. This marvelously translated poem captures all the complexity of the human heart – its pride on the part of the bride, and what one assumes must be the jealous hurt the older "co-wives" are feeling:

Youngest bride
of the hunter
just a peacock
feather
thrust in her braid
struts among her
co-wives
though they wear
elephant pearl

~ Potissa

Another poem, will in its detailed observation signal the loving connection and knowing between a mother and her newly married daughter:

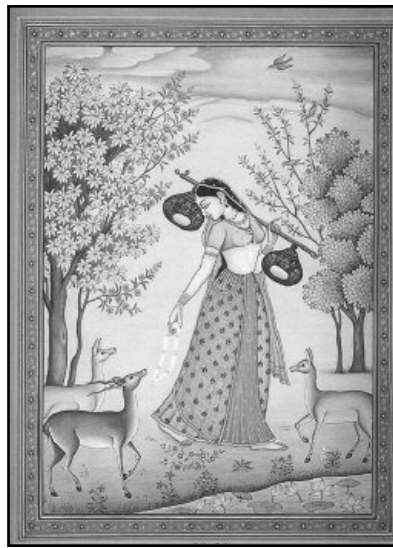
Skirt whipped
by wind
away from young thighs –
a toothmark –
and her old
mother
a glimpse at that
jewel box
is pleased

~ Hala

And one more poem to demonstrate how the collection reaches beyond the love shared between lovers to touch upon the rich plenitude our lives may find themselves apart of each day:

Between her little
son and her
husband
the lady sits –
milk leaks
from one breast
teased by a fingernail
the other one
stiffens

~ Hala



Ragini Todi, the wife of Raga Malkounsa



Ragini Todi

Fortunately, over the past fifty years, we have seen many remarkable translations of Asian poetry, particularly from ancient Chinese and Japanese. Unfortunately, we have not seen much poetry of ancient India translated to date. I would hope that this volume, through its many strengths, would encourage further translations from India. In the meantime, this volume stands as ready testament to the pleasure, wonder, and wisdom of that poetry.

This collection takes its name from the final poem in the collection, and it is altogether fitting that it does so. In the final poem, a hunter finds his quarry: a lone buck standing in a clearing. As he raises his bow to kill the buck, he notices the buck is not alone but is in the company of a doe. At this moment, the hunter sees through the experience into something greater. It is in that moment of *simpatico* that the hunter becomes undone:

Lone buck
in the clearing
nearby doe
eyes him with such
longing
that there
in the trees the hunter
seeing his own girl
lets the bow drop

This ending seems beautiful and right for a number of reasons, both important. On one level it mimics the response many readers will have I think when reading this book. When they arrive at the final poem, they too will move through the poem as the hunter does. They will be disarmed by the beauty of the forgoing poetry, stunned to never have heard voices as beautiful as this, voices like Vedya's who Schelling likens to Sappho and Lady Komachi and who has not heretofore been heard in English. Another thing that makes the ending seem right is that it is in itself a climatic moment of union between the man, his lover, and the natural world. All of the poems have been deeply sensual throughout the book. They have been infused with qualities flowing out of natural environment: sound, sight, touch, taste, sound. One can see them building to this cumulative close. At this moment, it is love that brings the hunter his vision of compassion that has him dropping the bow. Wondrous to think what it might mean to our world if we could all for a moment glimpse something like that vision of compassion. What bows would we be able to drop?

One final reason that the this poems closes the book nicely is because it takes us back to the first page of the book, the dedication page, where we read: "To the memory of Cid Corman" followed by a poem in original Sanskrit and the following translation:

Shining with the luster
of moon in autumn
may She, goddess, Language,
stripping from my
heart the endless woven darkness,
cast the nature of all
things into light.

Gregory Dunne is a scholar living in Japan. He was a friend of Cid Corman's. Two parts of a memoir of Cid Corman by Dunne appeared in issues 3 and 4 of the PRRB.



Ragini Todi



Krishna

VINCENT KATZ

Jim Feast



The Complete Elegies of Sextus Propertius
trans. Vincent Katz
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004)

I begin with a brutal thesis: *You can only translate back one age*. This means, for example, a postmodern translator can only go back to modernism, no matter what the ostensible date of what he or she is recasting. From this perspective, a translation by a modernist, whether Pound's of a Tang China poet or H.D.'s of Euripides, is (in a basic way) a romantic poem.

I will try to show this by examining Vincent Katz's translation of the elegies of Propertius, but I should mention that his work has to be distinguished *in its effect on him* from that of most translators. When Pope or Chapman translate Homer, their versions maintain the themes and tones of their other writing. Katz, unlike these illustrious predecessors, after his invaluable translation from the Latin, *turns against his own poetry*, radically revising its premises so that, as we'll see, a book like *Understanding Objects*, done while the translation was in progress, differs in fundamental outlook from *Rapid Departures*, which was mostly written after the translation.

Rather than moving chronologically, let's look the features of Propertius's elegies as they emerge in Katz's hands, how its key features are modernist, not classical, and then at how his deep reflections cause him to alter the course of his writing.

Without reading him, but knowing his content, one might judge Propertius to be a guilty sensualist. Guilty, not because he is carrying on an illicit love affair or due to Puritan reservations about sex on his part, but because he is writing love poetry when his patron and the emperor are urging him to take up the weightier topic of creating imperial propaganda (à la Vergil). However, whatever else he was doing, he wasn't wasting his talent, judging by Katz's resilient, at times graceful, at times crude, always lyrical translations, which are filled with tonal and vivid undertows.

Reading him, it appears Propertius sought to clear himself of charges of effeminacy by writing love poems for his sometimes mistress Cynthia that were themselves highly warlike. Since their love is storm-tossed, filled with tiffs and rifts, every poem describes a skirmish. Indeed, as Propertius puts it, he and Cynthia have written their own epic, "When nude, her dress ripped away, she wrestles with me // then truly we compose lengthy Illiads."

Further, if his heroic rivals in Rome filled their war poems with classical allusions to the Greeks, Propertius would give his poems stature and his own feelings girth by couching them within the same frame. When he is jealous, for instance, he says, "The same [jealous] dementia forced the Centaurs to smash // their rough cups on top of Pirithous."

However, one of the love poet's themes is even more provocatively bellicose. If battle often leads to death, so does love. In poem after poem, Propertius imagines his lover or himself gone, so he can picture the partner at the funeral. At his imagined obsequies, for example, he hears Cynthia wailing, "You were true, oh my god, though you lacked the distinction // of noble blood." He even imagines that, dead in Hades, he will think of Cynthia: "whatever I'll be, I'll always be called your image // a great love breaks through the shores of death."

Now up to this point, I may have been misleading if I've been taken to mean that a translation like this doesn't provide a real sense of Propertius's concerns and diction, as well as some sense of the intimate flavor of the Roman's times. I mean rather that, along with this, there is a problematic at play, and that, in such a translation, looking back one period, is Modernism's.



Vincent Katz, Vienna,
photo by Vivien Bittencourt



Understanding Objects
Vincent Katz
(West Stockbridge, MA:
Hard Press, 2000)

If we follow Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*, Modernism was plagued by *alienation*, brought on by the fact that those in the industrial West usually couldn't interact with or experience the reality on which their life was based, the exploited colonies. Now, imperial Rome, we might say, faced an analogous situation, though it did so more consciously. Virgil applauded the ongoing colonial conquests, which leading citizens might participate in, as generals, so, we can guess, modern alienation was not general in the elite, but rather a specialized disease, reserved for those, like Propertius, who couldn't "get with the program." (I'll return to this.)

Another step. Again, following Jameson, the central problem of Postmodernism is *disconnection*, attributable to a landscape of globalized finance and multinationals, which, for one, totally unlink near-term cause and effect, so, for instance, that a person may lose her or his job due to policies decided worlds away in shadowy offices of international agencies. On the ground, in poetry, dealing with this underlying sense becomes, in the New York school, for one, a struggle to find any kind of significance in the day to day. Take O'Hara's masterpiece "The Day Lady Died," which, while filled with genuine feeling, is also emotionally grounded in the fact that Holiday's death gives the poet's day a kind of shape and closure it would otherwise lack.

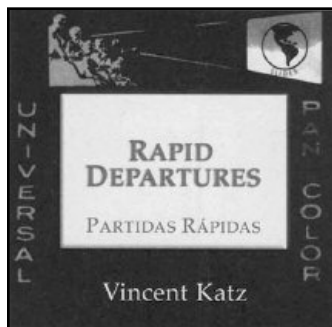
Katz pre-Propertius writing, in books such as *Understanding Objects*, although tactically quite different, deals with the same problem of the quotidian's meaninglessness. In the back of the poet's mind is always the nagging question "I don't know what's expected of me nor by whom." Sometimes, he looks for meaning in what O'Hara's generation sought, days organized by a kind of immanent purpose, which arose naturally, unprovoked, from confluent circumstances. There are, still, some intimations of this quest, some seeking of "details // of a life, the fruit forms // a design on marble counter // now the Christ lights up the mist." In this passage and in poems such as "June In Progress" a haphazard but somehow eminently fitting grouping of events and objects round off a day.

However, moving beyond these concerns, Katz embarks on another, unprecedented search, as he looks for *seamlessness*, a life in which daily tasks, meetings with friends and moments of art-making would join in an unlooked-for, easy comradeship. Perhaps not surprisingly, this is something he finds existent in other artists' lives more than in his own. In an elegy to James Merrill, he writes that he "Maintained contacts, found words perfect- // suited to his non-mission: simply // be Jim. ... His life turned into books." This captures in a broad way the coherence of Merrill, who appears to live in an effortless, multi-connected flow. The same insight is brought out anecdotally when Katz recalls a poet at a reading. "He's // talking, // casually, // then, // introduced, // goes up // simply and // keeps speaking, // no // division."

It can be guessed that since the seamlessness that Katz highlights is always the possession of others, his own attainment of this state is frustrated. Whether for that or other reasons, his translation of Propertius provides him with the means to leap beyond this impasse. Let me explain, now why I think translators have a limited reach, in terms of an age's problematic. If a writer is concerned, say, with the blocked progress to a more democratic, communal and convivial society (as is Katz), she or he may need a remove, but not too great of one, in which to get a grip on the historical axis.

I know this is getting a bit abstract, so let's bring it to cases. Katz in translating the Roman author is asking himself what strategies Propertius used to fight against the alienation he felt in relation to his country's imperialist project, which, we saw, basically consisted of placing a love affair as his central focus, but not as a way of withdrawing from the tides sweeping the day, since, with devices we have named, his portrayals of sex and affection are filled with martial echoes.

Something similar becomes a shaping force in *Rapid Departures*. Katz's wife, Vivien, is Brazilian, and all these poems are written in her homeland, some being almost travelogues as they introduce the reader to various cities. They are faced on matched pages by Portuguese translations in a book filled with precise, evocative line drawings, and with a few color photos of Brazilian record sleeves on which poems



Rapid Departures
Vincent Katz
(Sao Paulo: Atelie Editorial,
2005)

have been inscribed.

So what is the tie to the *Elegies*? For Katz, *the city becomes part of a love affair with his wife*. In other words, where Propertius fights his alienation by turning from war to love poetry, as I see it, to overcome disconnection, Katz structures his seemingly casual jottings about a day's activities, one of the *de rigueur* forms of postmodern verse, so they appear as demi-homages. There are three basic cinching points that establish this direction, giving the sequence a tensile strength not found in his earlier poems or, indeed, in other poets' use of this widespread postmodern form.

Most obviously, there are a few, exquisite straightforward love poems, which, nonetheless, function also as evokers of the city. In "Quaresmeira," as he stands with Vivien in the rain, he says, "I want to look at you." He doesn't mean,

though, as Propertius might have, to admire her physical charms, but to see her integrated in the surroundings. "My emotions can't keep // pace with the beauty, // drops of water on roses // in my wife's hands." It's not that she is not the epicenter, but that it is only because she is part of the repertoire of rain, flowers and street that the scene suddenly becomes iron-ribbed or, as he says with heart-breaking lyricism,

*As she stands with me
in front of the world
in a tiny, private spot,
which passes instantly
and never goes out*

Another cinching point involves what might be called *in-lit animations* of street life. People and objects are not simply passing in the crowd, as they might be in *Objects*, but interacting. In "Rua," "a man begins attaching the rope // to a car behind the truck." In "Today," Katz notes, "[I] watched a woman // say goodbye to three men." This last poem is summed up by this: "I simply stood there and watched // the

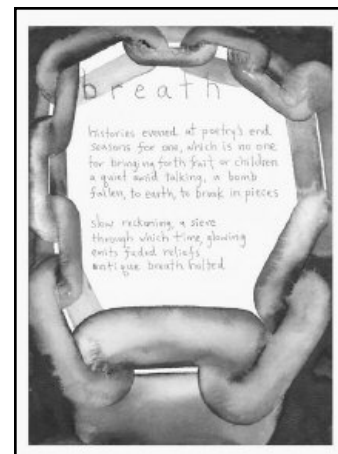
unscripted scene unfold // every word, every action, a perfect take."

The city is not a cabinet of unknowable curiosities, as it is in the conventional postmodern catalog, but a set of relationships opening to the observer; and I would argue that it's as if, *being connected at a heart level* through his wife to a foreign city, he is able to offer a degree of humanized attention and responsiveness to the places, which would otherwise be difficult to muster.

And building on this, there's a third, even more inventive link discernible. If, as we saw, Vivien gives depth to the human interactions taking place, she also adds another layer to objects. Not that they are anthropomorphized, but, in a variation on the pathetic fallacy, it seems they naturally arrange themselves to notate or blend into any contiguous human situation. Katz puts this programmatically in "Bread and Sweets": "friends, haircut, architecture // slide downhill where everything // meshes." More specifically, in poem after poem, he puts forward a scenario in which objects, landscapes and people engage in supportive Interplay. In "City," as he describes, "mosaic sidewalks // lit in pools // tree friendly murk // the body // loosed from northern // care // beach city rapid // languor."

Love, then, as a guiding device gives the poems of *Rapid Departures* a very tough fiber. By taking the measure of Propertius, Katz has been able to draw on the Roman in a way that enables him to make a breakthrough, pushing out from, without shirking, the problem of disconnection. To speak generally, current poetry is an art of flashes and unfinished gestures, which can be exciting and spottily lyrical, but is too often unfocused, as it falls away. In contrast, *Rapid Departures* gives postmodern city poems something they never possessed: a skeleton.

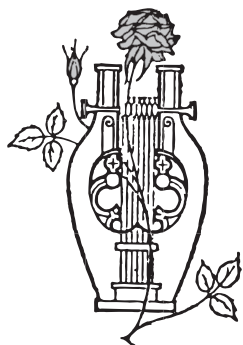
Jim Feast wrote the novel Neo Phobe (Autonomedia) with Ron Kolm, and is a member of the underground collective of noir humorists, beer mystics, anarchists, neophobes and passionate debunkers called the Unbearables. He lives in New York.



*A page from Alcuni Telefonini,
poems by Vincent Katz,
watercolors by Francesco Clemente
Granary Books, 2008*

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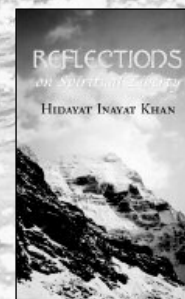
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A SINGULAR EVENT HORIZON

Jordan Zinovich

Donald Breckenridge adores New York City — every aspect of it at every season. And he loves being a New York writer. From darkest Queens to Turtle Bay, from the West Village to Williamsburg, his ambitious and tightly structured new novel, *You Are Here*, celebrates The City and its aspiring writers, temp workers, experience parasites, hipsters, and wealthy jaded hedonists. But there are shadows in his paradise, and with potent technical virtuosity Breckenridge flirts with “hypertextual” interleavings and metafiction to suspend time and explode linearity.

I don’t use the term “hypertext” here in reference to digital productions like Michael Joyce’s fascinating *afternoon, a story* (Cambridge, MA: Eastgate Systems, Inc., 1987), but “to describe traditionally-published books in which a non-linear and interactive narrative is achieved through internal references.” (See Wikipedia’s definition of hypertext fiction) Vladimir Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* (NY: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1962), Julio Cortázar’s *Hopscotch* (translation, NY: Random House, 1966), Georges Pérec’s *Life: A User’s Manual* (translation, Lincoln, MA: David R. Godine, 1987), and Milorad Pavić’s *Dictionary of the Khazars: A lexicon novel* (translation, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988) are particularly fine examples of this narrative strategy.

You Are Here is a singular achievement. Breckenridge employs the self-reflective strategies of metafiction and the skills he has developed as a playwright to begin immediately to complicate his novel’s nonlinear structure, inserting himself as a character in the first sentences. And throughout the novel, dialogue that isn’t actually formatted for drama is blocked out in his sentence structures to explore action and intent. As the first sentences demonstrate, the whole carefully crafted package quickly draws the reader in as a participating character.



You Are Here
Donald Breckenridge
(Buffalo, NY:
Starcherone Books,
2009. US\$16)

The light from my desk lamp fell upon the conversation between Janet, “Oh, it’s for my benefit,” a childless divorcee in her mid-forties who was living off a substantial monthly stipend from her second husband. And James, “Do you think,” a twenty-four year old aspiring writer who worked part-time in a used bookstore, “I should write that down?” They were seated on a recently repainted bench in Union Square. She opened her purse, “here’s my pen,” and handed it to him. It was a warm Thursday in mid-October, approximately five miles and six months away from the desk where I was fleshing out their conversation. . . .



Donald Breckenridge

The base plot has him working on a play but, as his fictive self subsequently tells Peter, once a member of The Living Theater, now a hip gallery owner, “There isn’t really going to be any play . . . it’s all fiction. . . . loosely based on the production of a performance that never happened.” But it’s fiction with mimetic integrity, including all the elements of a developing play and imbuing even his more reprehensible characters with life.

Though not as whimsical or fantastical as my favorite examples of the hypertext genre, Breckenridge’s novel compares favorably with them in many ways. *You Are Here* does to theater what *Pale Fire* did to poetry and *Dictionary of the Khazars* did to lost history. And his elegant ending folds all the story’s elements into a neat recursive package that slips past the event horizon to vanish into the black hole left by the collapsing World Trade Towers. Breckenridge offers an elegiac gesture to a place and time, a nod to alternative realities that might have been; could be; perhaps were.

Jordan Zinovich is a senior editor with the Autonomedia Collective, one of North America’s most notable underground publishing houses. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

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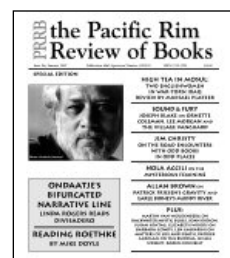
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THE WOMEN

Linda Rogers

T.C. Boyle, the author of the hilarious *The Road to Wellville*, a send up of John Harvey Kellogg and his ilk, who tinkered with mortality, and *The Inner Circle*, the cervical ring around sex researcher Alfred Kinsey, has taken on another larger than life character in the vastly gifted and inordinately self-absorbed architect Frank Lloyd Wright.

The author lives in the hundred year old George C. Stewart house, the first of Wright's California commissions, a perfect place it would seem to channel the *ache* or divine breath of its architect, given that Wright was part of a synesthetic movement and paid attention to the smallest details which would be felt in every moment lived within its parameters.

I almost wish he had allowed Taliesin, the Arts and Crafts monument Wright built for himself, his acolytes, apprentices, family and extended family members to tell the story of an extraordinary life. If only the walls had spoken, then we might have found real life in the arrangement of souls within a pattern of phenomenal objects: windows, doors, tables, dishes, rugs, drawings and flower arrangements.

Wright's tragedy is that he was constantly designing and re-designing his world. He was playing God, and when a woman, a bouquet or a salad wilted, it had to be trashed. That is a story his house, which repeatedly went up in flames in a metaphorical analogue to his passionate quest for perfection, could have told more poignantly than the women he used to satisfy his appetite for power and control.

Boyle, subscribing to the homocentric notion that women are beautiful fenestration, windows into the souls of the men they love, has chosen to reveal the man through their experiences with him. *The Women* is a conglomerate piece, an awkward composite of Olgivanna, the mystical Gurgideff disciple, Miriam, the morphine addicted vamp, the free-spirited Mamah, who abandoned her children, and the fecund and faithful Kitty, all of whom had abandoned themselves in love for, not with, the famous and often infamous architect.

Sadly, it has been biologically and socially built into such women that they have the face value of the man whose children they bear. This is Darwinism, at its best or worst, as the case may be. The beautiful conjoin and the race evolves. Wright's women are the equivalent of celebrity groupies, starfuckers whose status is determined by the wealth and fame of their sexual partners. Sadly, they, especially the ill-fated Mamah who was carved to pieces by a diminished household servant (surprise, black people



The Women
T.C. Boyle
Viking Canada
451 pages



T.C. Boyle in 2003, photo by Spencer Boyle

don't like to be patronised) whose lack of entitlement fueled his homicidal rage, perceived themselves as feminists.

The women are all transparencies who made the devil's decision to live as moths in the flame of Wright's self-declared genius.

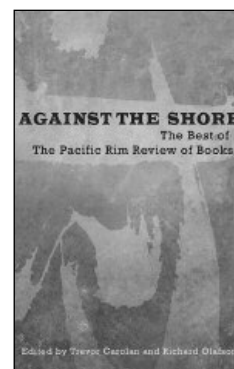
My own definition of the word genius is that it is the gene that allows the union of the "I" and the "us," revealing what we already know, that healthy community is an organism with a shared ethical intelligence. Wright, forgetting that there is always a higher power, believed that mind was his own. His was a fatal mistake, a compelling story of *hubris*.

If these stories were as skillfully polished as Wright's synesthetic projects they might have revealed facets of an enigmatic individual. However, we never really get inside the mind of the greatest architect America ever produced, his "life designs" changing the way people lived.

Boyle's memoirist is the architect Tadashi Sato, a Wright apprentice who, because of his cultural difference, might have integrated the sensibilities of the women who briefly appeared in the windows of Taliesin, but doesn't. I found Sato an unconvincing narrator, much like the western writers who have written from the point of view of Japanese geishas. It takes years to become a geisha and even longer to become a woman. In the end, told out of order, the confusing narrative meant to find its climax in an out of sequence tragic event, fails to bring us the man who took the Arts and Crafts movement that spread across the world like a virus to its American zenith.

Frank Lloyd Wright's story is best told in the buildings that have survived him. Boyle has written a somewhat frustrating story of a confusing time when a new world was supposedly rising in the ashes of the old, much like Taliesin, an ideal subjected to the empirical laws of nature, which listens to no man.

Linda Rogers is Victoria's Poet Laureate. Her latest book is *Muscle Memory* from Ekstasis Editions.



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

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

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PARADISE LOST, AGAIN

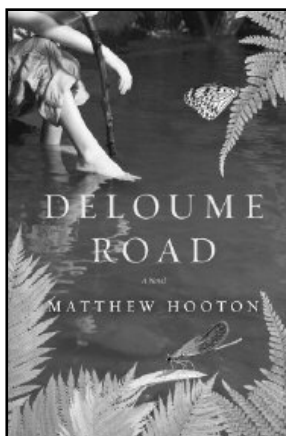
Linda Rogers

There are times during walks in the woods when the underbrush startles. First there is a noise. It isn't breathing or the holding of breath, but could be the frisson of wing brushing against leaf, or pages turning? I have been surprised, ambushed by an amazing book, the way CS Lewis was surprised by Joy, love in middle age.

Matthew Hooten was one of several readers at a recent author breakfast. It is not normally my wakeful time. I take a while; need a long bath, strong coffee before I react to anything. It started with blackberries, Hooten describing a time close to his own bones, boyhood in the Cowichan Valley, where off road berries are as tender as a babies' fist. As he read, I smelled fruit as plump as summer rain, as sweet as sunshine. I smelled the end of summer.

Deloume Road is a living water-colour of a place where innocence stumbled in the gap between then and now, when the Cowichan Valley filled up with communards, draft dodgers and religious pilgrims, all of them on the damaged road to somewhere. Matthew Hooten was the child of this exodus. With a child's eye, he has captured a moment when the possible became impossible.

Like Thomas Hardy, Hooten realises landscape painting is a fluent medium for storytelling. Just as water and pigment move through porous paper, so do his diverse characters migrate through fertile soil, all of them as natural as leaves composting on the forest floor. His is an appropriately diverse cast, boys riding the last wave of innocence and men and women who already know that grief waits at the end of every road, however promising.



Deloume Road
Matthew Hooten
Knopf Canada
2010, 311 pages
\$29.95

Even the rain is a character in this drama of foreground and background, with transformations occurring between generations and species as "colours shift and spread in the torn-canvas sunset."

Slowly, as water moves into the breathing spaces in paper, Hooten introduces his characters, giving them room to take on their appointed spirit roles in the cautionary journey down a road singing with sensory detail.

Deloume Road is an intense book, its perspectives saturated with sound and colour, its inhabitants troubled by history and complex family relationships and haunted by the story of Gerard Deloume, the surveyor who hung himself from a tree one hundred years ago.

What sucked the soul out of Gerard Deloume? The question hovers, just as the needle in his lost and found compass wobbles at North, the enchanted word of the special needs child who briefly wears it around his neck. By the time the dead man's compass, the white-comers original garbage "just another piece of junk" translated into original sin, is discovered, we know it will not point the way to salvation.

Even before we are introduced to the boys who are central to this story, we hear the muffled drums that foreshadow tragedy in the beating of dragonfly wings that

(continued on page 35)



Matthew Hooten



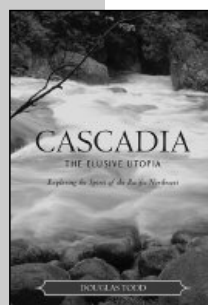
I Have My Mother's Eyes

A Holocaust Memoir Across Generations

Barbara Ruth Bluman

Bluman chronicles her mother's escape from Nazi-occupied Poland with the help of a brave Japanese Consul, Chiune Sugihara, who risked his life to give the family the necessary documents to travel from Lithuania across Russia, then on to Japan, and finally to Canada. At the same time, Bluman interpolates accounts of her own battle with cancer and how her parents' journey gave strength to her own. When Bluman succumbed to her cancer, the memoir was completed by her daughter, Danielle — becoming a woman's story across three generations.

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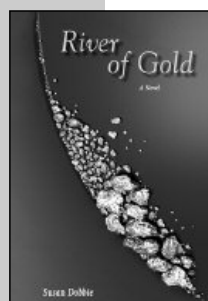


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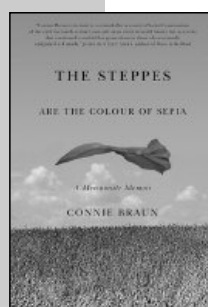


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REMEMBERING ALLEN GINSBERG AT HOLLYHOCK FARM

Colin James Sanders

Off Beat: the Allen Ginsberg interview with Hillel Wright is a quirky text comprising 59 pages cobbled together from a 45 minute interview Hillel Wright obtained from Allen Ginsberg 25 years ago. Ginsberg was at Hollyhock Farm, Cortez Island, B.C. to facilitate a workshop on poetics. The interview itself is 39 pages, and the remainder of the text folds in some “memories of Allen” by friends, including original TISH group poet Jamie Reid, and a few pages culled from Trevor Carolan’s memoir of the same gathering, *Giving Up Poetry: With Allen Ginsberg at Hollyhock* (2001), which remains a fairly accurate account worth reading in its entirety.

Wright originally planned to interview Ginsberg, Gary Snyder and Paul Krassner, who in 1985 would all present their ideas at Hollyhock. His plan was to feature the interviews on Vancouver’s Co-Op Radio under the heading, “Beats on the Beach”, a heading Ginsberg tells Wright is “corny.” Circumstances did not permit the other meetings, but Wright managed the Ginsberg session, which almost 25 years later he has published.

I attended this gathering with Ginsberg and still recall the event fondly, thinking Ginsberg a gracious and considerate person, willing to respond to questions he had been asked before on many, many occasions. Ginsberg’s mind was sharp and penetrating, disciplined, erudite and wise. He did not suffer fools gladly, espousing as he did the practices of scholarly study, research and scholarly exploration.

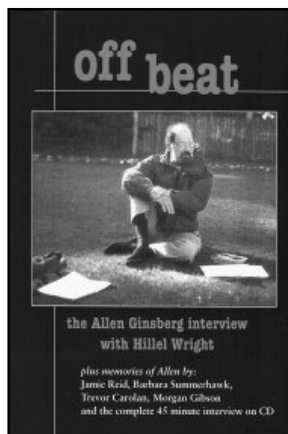
I recall Wright arriving on the island in his own boat, having sailed from Denman Island where he lived and had recently become a sole parent with four daughters. Wright and I spoke on the beach at Hollyhock before Wright interviewed Ginsberg, and he borrowed my copy of Allen’s *Collected Poems: 1947-1980*, which Ginsberg had graciously inscribed for me on May 5th, my 31st birthday. I didn’t want to lose it.

About the event itself, each early morning began with us sitting in silent meditation for an hour in a room overlooking Georgia Strait. The day would end with most of us naked in the hot tub on the deck, deep in conversation. There was pot and some Jack Daniels I’d brought with me from the city. Some participated, others didn’t.

Wright’s conversation with Ginsberg ranges widely. It begins with Wright attempting to have Ginsberg describe the origins of the word “beat,” as it describes and defines the poets and others most often associated with Ginsberg himself, such as Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gary Snyder et al., but also, more pointedly, Kerouac, Herbert Huncke and others whose lived experience would account for a “beat” life, and a “beatific” life. Ginsberg initially comes across as impatient, combative, and when Wright perseveres, pressing for a definition of “beat,” for example, Ginsberg, exasperated, exclaims, “I do get a little bit bored with having to say the same thing over and over and over again, tell the same story over and over and over again like the Ancient Mariner with an albatross around my neck...” Bluntly he tells Wright, “it doesn’t sound like you did much [research] actually, to tell you the truth...”

The conversation moves along, especially after Wright and Ginsberg share a joint, and a number of interesting threads develop. Wright’s interview is a good introduction to Ginsberg’s work, especially for novices, in that it captures Ginsberg’s wide range of literary, political, and cultural associations, and life-long interests. For example, Ginsberg traces the trajectory that appeared in Beat poetry and essays concerning local environmental issues and planetary ecological concerns, citing Snyder’s work here, as well as Michael McClure’s. The interview also spotlights Allen’s views of the political context of the U.S. in the 1960’s, and the ramifications of its paranoid Cold War focus on U.S. students against the war in Vietnam, notably Tom Hayden and the original Students for a Democratic Society, and especially against the Black Panthers.

There is also some provocative dialogue regarding actress Jean Seberg, an Andy Warhol associate, and her political activism. Ginsberg notes Seberg’s relationship



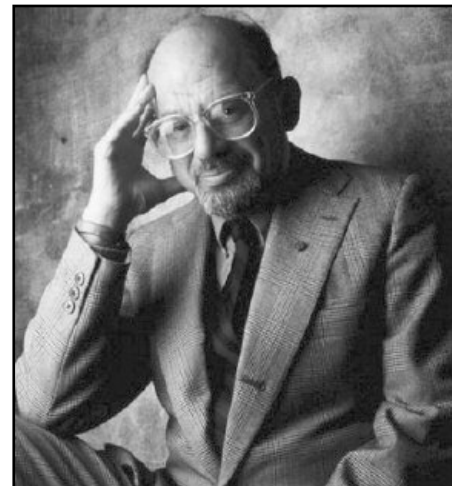
Off Beat: the Allen Ginsberg interview with Hillel Wright
Hillel Wright.
Printed Matter, 2009

with a Black Panther and the possibility that the FBI was complicit in her death. He adds “Gregory Corso knew her quite well and dated her a few times and she was a patron of the arts and occasionally I think, um, bought poems from him...” This during Corso’s Paris sojourn.

Ginsberg and Wright agree on what they see as the demise of Jann Wenner’s once progressive *Rolling Stone Magazine*. Allen observes, “I’m afraid *Rolling Stone* has gone downhill and is just...part of the chauvinistic pack journalism at this point. With typical candour he clarifies, “but I’m prejudiced ’cause they didn’t review my book or my rock and roll record.”

A few minor quibbles: “Recchi” (p.26) should be John Rechy, and Wright could have used a different title. Perhaps he was unaware that Kerouac’s friend, musician David Amram, penned a memoir called *Offbeat: Collaborating with Kerouac* (2002). That said, Wright has led his own beat existence in working as a tree planter, commercial fisherman, editor and publisher. His previous publications include two novels, anthologies, a book of short stories, and poetry chapbook, *Single Father*. His bio notes that he currently lives in Kawasaki, Japan, and is Japanese Correspondent for *Fishing News International* (London). Readers will his latest work commendable. Bringing this conversation into print offers another illuminating thread to the always intriguing Ginsberg archive.

A Vancouver psychologist, Colin James Sanders sends this review from Sayulita, Mexico. He has published in Beat Scene and Making Waves (Anvil Press, 2010.)



Allen Ginsberg

PARADISE LOST (continued from page 34)

decorate its title pages. We know Matthew, responsible for Andy, his developmentally challenged brother, will falter under his weight. We know that Miles, the abused child of ignorance, will be pivotal to a crushing life lesson. We know that Josh, the hypersensitive mediator, will suffer in the family dynamic of Matthew and Andy just as he is caught in his own family tensions.

What will happen to these children, and to the missing son of Al Henry the First Nations Painter, the unborn child of Korean immigrant Irene whose soldier husband has already gone to spirit and the son of the butcher who is waiting, a crow’s flight from Chernobyl, to emigrate from Russia? Do these restless souls really belong here?

Settlement is the desecration of nature and nature will take prisoners, one of them the child who finds the surveyor’s compass after another has dropped it in the river. At that moment, in an agony of foreshadowing, Hooten draws our attention to the tricksters, “Two crows landed in the branches of the tree above him, squawking and provoking each other until they locked talons and beaks in a blur of flapping black wings and tumbled from the tree...”

As his colours fill in the lush greens of the northern jungle, Hooten invites us to watch the cosmos and microcosmos expanding and contracting and to understand the caveat: this paradise is as fragile as little boys and berries.

The writer gives lots of room for our fears to develop. Each chapter is a brushstroke in an impressionist painting, a drop of rain in the cup of knowledge of good and evil. There is space in this book to absorb the richness of its content, its Biblical spin.

This is a great book, one that deserves a pause at the end, like the silence that envelops an audience that has heard a great piece of music and is too affected to applaud.

Linda Rogers’ new books are Muscle Memory, poetry from Ekstasis Editions, and The Third Day Book, a novel, from Cormorant books.

THE INVENTOR OF LOVE & OTHER WRITINGS

Allan Graubard

“...from one temple to the other, the ebony blood of my virtual suicide drains in virulent silence... the bullets crisscross my brain day and night... dispersing inside the skull an odor of detonated gun powder, of clotted blood, of chaos.”

— Luca, *Inventor of Love*

Gherasim Luca, surrealist poet, artist, and theorist, has finally been translated into English, with two volumes this year: *The Passive Vampire* and *Inventor of Love & Other Writings*. Known as well to allies of surrealism and related circles in his native Bucharest and in Paris — where he exiled himself some forty years until his actual suicide in 1994 — he has come to us, as it often happens, through the praise of another. In this case, it is Gilles Deleuze who finds in Luca, quite simply, “a great poet among the greatest.”

Nor should we forget Luca’s influence on Deleuze for his part in *Anti-Oedipus*, which seems at this juncture to have passed largely from interest or commentary.

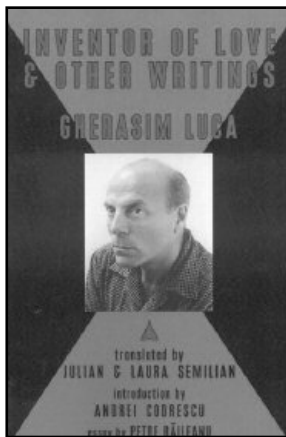
The relationship of poetry to philosophy has commonly been one of precedence. From the origin of a sensibility comes a discursive horizon that details its own evolution, for its own time. Whatever the philosopher sustains of the poet is something to discover, of course. But for a poet such as Luca, sensibility has a primacy that time does not diminish by virtue of alterations in the character of an idea. The poetic work eludes the constraints imposed upon it by history, its clarities and opacities interweaving perhaps in new ways as we encounter them but there, precise to the inspiration that revealed them.

Luca composes *Inventor of Love* in the 1940s, during the dark days of fascist rule in Romania, still suffering under its terrorist arm, The Iron Guard. As a surrealist committed to the overthrow of class society, principally by subverting its psychological underpinnings, and as a Jew, his marginalization is acute. In order to survive, he secludes himself and endures a clandestine existence along with his women and his few friends who comprise the Romanian surrealist group.

Yet as a group — founded in 1940, disbanded in 1947 — they maintain collective activity as they can. Post-war, before the Iron Curtain descends and socialist realism absorbs cultural activity, crushing independence as it does so, they make significant contributions to surrealism internationally, outlining a revolutionary poetic program, with Luca playing a decisive role.

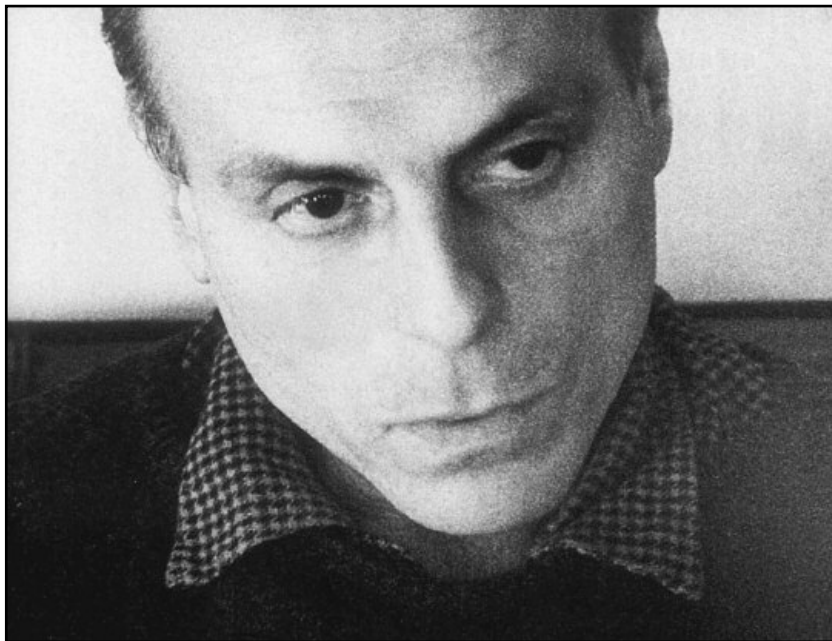
There is little question that *Inventor of Love* is a major accomplishment. Within it, Luca charts an act of poetic and theoretical revolt against the moral universe that typifies love as merely romantic or otherwise monogamous, and for procreation. As the myth of Oedipus is foundational here for Luca, he makes it his target; this myth which ties love to its repressed, reflected image in family, religion, and too much of the myriad relations of power that form our world.

It is, in no uncertain terms, Luca’s attempt to reinvent love; to free this voluptuous, anti-social passion from the fetters that deform it. There is risk here, of course. And for one such as Luca, whose clarity is matched by the fervor of his writing, the tensions evoked are consequential. So much so that suicide, in contrast to the epochal blood baths crashing around him, is not something to avoid. And however desperate this may seem to us, especially in terms of poetry, or precisely because of poetry, it is necessary to note the authority in the act, from whence it comes and how it repudiates a world where mass butchery is the norm by a final act of desertion.



The Inventor of Love & Other Writings

Gherasim Luca
Translated by Julian
and Laura Semilian
Black Widow Press,
Boston, MA 02116
143 pp. Paper \$19.95



Gherasim Luca

Luca thus attempts to commit suicide five times: strangulation by the aid of a necktie fastened to a door handle, Russian roulette, stabbing, poison, and self-strangulation. Before each attempt he leaves a note and afterward a commentary that depicts his struggle to rob death of its anonymity in a world flush with death, to rob death finally of the fear it induces; and to survive, which he does, with death for him “dead” thereafter.

And so he writes, animated by the extremity he has brought himself to, with love balancing the scales, the body erupting through it all: tormented and tormenting, supernal with pleasure and power, this chaos he sublimates and transmutes; a font, in fact, of a poetic ascesis that allows him to grasp between a man and a woman the lineaments of a new kind of bond that will ground his efforts from then on. Along the way, as if in counterpoint, Luca assembles objects from things he finds or, more to the point, that find him; assemblages with near magic potencies that reveal the latent content of dreams as they confirm, however partially or completely, a route for his next move.

He writes: “...the female bodies that rendezvous inside my lover leave at the door, like a useless corpse, all their knowns, the ideas they had formulated about love... that cause her to search in me for that same lugubrious personage of a thousand masks that is her father.”

He writes: “...nothing can make me believe that love comes by anything other than this mortal passageway to the marvelous, inciting lascivious perilousness, in its aphrodisiac catacomb, where the never-before-encountered and the never-before-seen are the current characters of a continual surprise.”

I should add, to balance this nexus, that it is for man as for a woman, with the father replaced by the mother, and love for both an all too congenial substitute for ideational incest, with procreation the resumption of mothering and fathering along with the values it attracts. This is another reason that Luca pursues his arc; and something for us to consider during a period when genocide, however corralled by place, stalks us under the guise, yet again, of a nationalized father image.

Where does such a poet come from? Biographical details or a discussion of influences will not do much to draw this man, born as Salman Locker, and who upon finding an obit to his liking took its name for his own, substituting a phantom for his lineage. Perhaps because his desire is magnetic, he will attract you by his words and the objects he creates and discusses as external punctuations of this quest, amazed at the reciprocity that chance avails him through manufacturing and misuse. Perhaps you will find something of yourself in him; something you might wish not to meet yet which he compels you to admit; that you, too, might do as he did — were you free enough or compelled enough to follow the spark to its inevitable, overarching combustion in this particular way.

Most disarming, of course, is his candor; his understanding that poetic liberty is a very risky business in a world where family absorbs passion, genuflection masks love, and petty fears and hatreds proliferate as social mores and political platforms infused by the power of armaments and the illusions that control their use.

Inventor of Love is structured into four texts: *Inventor of Love*, *I Roam the Impossible*, *The Dead Death*, and an *Appendix*. Luca’s “other writings” fall under the rubric *The Praying Mantis Appraised* with 14 texts. Throughout are gems brilliant with incisions, sudden fulgurations, critical incantations, lucent despairs, and a lucidity tempered by sex whose white heat protects a definitive cold perception of duplicities with incendiary ruthless concision: alias Gherasim Luca.

Allan Graubard is a poet, playwright and critic. His most recent play, *Woman Bomb/Sade*, played in New York in 2008. In 2009 his book *Fragments from Nomad Days & Other Poems & Tales* will be published by Ekstasis Editions.

THE PRACTICE OF PERFECTION

Linda Rogers

Practice, practice, practice, Wynton Marsalis said to my trumpet playing son, without mentioning the invisible factor. There are several elements to perfection, one of them a glass ceiling far short of heaven, the aspiration of the young postulants narrating this broken story of initiation into the cult of sisterhood.

"Shout all you want," the song goes, "It doesn't matter/ don't you know that I am mostly water?" The holy water in Mary Frances Coady's fictional nunnery is a quiet turbulence undisturbed by brilliance. In the first, swept- away, reference to the gifts that make life bearable, one of the postulants must give up her cello. What is life without music? What is God without music?

That is a personal question for all of us, and one that Coady does not answer. If she has wrestled with this angel, the outcome, in his piece of writing, is unclear; and we are left with the questions that torment these girls who have dedicated themselves to a life of renunciation.

The practice of perfection is an open possibility. For those who embrace their moment, it means the polishing of a gift, the object being to transcend practice and experience the epiphanies offered by art or the goodness we call grace.

The problem faced by Coady's young postulants is finding the meaning in a life that pines for eternity. What if? Eternity may be a void as empty as the routine chores that distract the nuns from the phenomenal world where other girls have creative lives with options: they may marry and have children, play in symphony orchestras, run for public office, or stand in the barricades.

The repetitious folding and unfolding of priestly vestments, polishing of brass and scrubbing may take the postulants closer to grace or to the void when they turn their backs on their god-given gifts to improve the world.



Mary Frances Coady

I have sent two maiden ladies to their heavenly bridegroom in box condition. Both times, watching the coffin lid close, I had to wonder. Was he really waiting for them? Was this a life fully lived or a foolish avoidance of the meaning of life?

Coady approaches this doubting very tentatively. Her attention to detail is scrupulous and the surface of the convent is as polished as its wood and brass interiors, but, as if held back by decorum or fear, she does not go deeper. Irony is just a little joke, a moment out of the closet, before it darts back in. The novice mistress disappears at the end of the book, but we are detached from her torment because Coady's narrative has the smoothness of starched linen.

Nuns are captured at the same time other young women are recruited for sexual slavery. It is a tribal time when they are wanting to belong and looking for love. All of these longings are present in the postulants in *The Practice of Perfection*, and their story is a cautionary tale for young women who are, these days, staying away from convents in droves and directing their passion elsewhere, to causes that allow them the independent thinking forbidden in the religious life.

Coady stands back from their process. I suspect the book was first written as independent stories because she leaps from one point of view to another. This gives us the funhouse mirror image of the convent but doesn't allow us to identify with one character going through the slow purgatory of renunciation. This may be intentional. As the rules state, all sisters are equal in friendship, all words are directed to a higher authority. The only particular friend is Jesus.

Is the convent the ante-room to Heaven or just a chamber of Hell?

The sisters will spend their lives on their knees, subservient to Jesus' male representatives on Earth and doing service of one kind or another. Some will question their vocation and some will wait for the big reward, *O Come Emmanuel*. If that sounds



The Practice of Perfection
Mary Frances Coady
Coteau Books, 2009,
paperback, 213 pages

facetious, it is and it isn't. Coady barely hints at the physicality of young nuns in their sexual prime, of the hormonal anguish that can lead to cruelty and sometimes mental breakdown, for what?

Last weekend I interviewed a young artist whose goal is to get masses of people singing together so that their collective energy will transform the world. I reminded her that this was not a new concept. The maharishis believe meditation will turn the trick. The holy contemplatives wait for God to fill their silence with wisdom. Coady's young sisters in Jesus hope to blend into the one note that will set nature right; but is one note music?

I think she wants to believe it, that this book, which hums in a major key, is an affirmation. The problem is, practice doesn't make perfect. It is the leaps of faith or lack of it that give us our real glimpses of perfection. Coady doesn't go there, and we are left with the smell of beeswax and the life of an endangered hive.

Linda Rogers *Empress Letters* is the first in a trilogy of novels about a family living inside the opium triangle.

EVOLVING ORGANIC (continued from page 6)

Kapuscinski was aware of the history of the area, which though a fishing village in Herodotus's time, would become a port for the great Phoenician and Greek trading ships. Generations of future scholars will no doubt give the lion his due and place Ryszard Kapuscinski in his most appropriate historic context; meanwhile, Kapuscinski stands well against any of his critics, any day of the week.

"I have always rediscovered my home, rediscovered Pinsk, in Africa, in Asia, in Latin America," Kapuscinski said in an interview. "It's not that the story is not getting expressed" in ordinary news reports. "It's what surrounds the story. The climate, the atmosphere of the street, the feeling of the people, the gossip of the town; the smell; the thousands and thousands of elements that are part of the events you read about in 600 words of your morning paper."


notes

[1] Ryszard Kapuscinski, Polish Writer of Shimmering Allegories and News, Dies at 74
<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/24/world/europe/24kapuscinski.html>

[2] Kapuscinski, published works in English
<http://www.randomhouse.com/author/results.pperl?authorid=15080>

[3] The Lies of Ryszard Kapuscinski
<http://www.slate.com/id/2158315/?nav=fix>

Robert Philbin lectures frequently on subjects pertaining to the Humanities, and his published essays, reviews, political commentary and poetry are available on line. He is currently developing a mixed media poetry-graphics project with New York artist Joseph Nechvatal.



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MEXICAN TRANSLATIONS OF ACHING BEAUTY

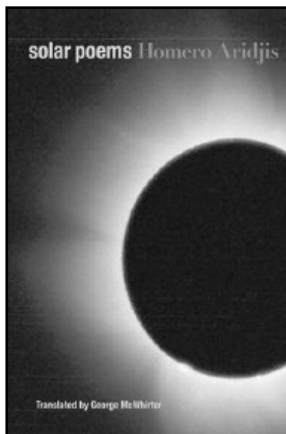
Apis Teicher

Solar Poems is a profoundly spiritual and uplifting exploration of the self and the universe around us. Aridjis' poetry examines that ever elusive search for a sense of self – both from the intensely intimate reflections on loved ones past and present, and the search for the all encompassing *Tao* of one's purpose and place in the greater whole. Aridjis' reflections range from the mythical and sublime to the mundane; he is equally at ease discussing his mortality and what may follow after as the more pressing concerns of our environmental excesses.

McWhirter's translation is achingly beautiful. With the inclusion of the original poems in Spanish side by side with the translations the reader can fully appreciate the painstaking faithfulness to the original, not just in terms of language but in its very poetic essence. Although on occasion he makes some interesting choices – as in the case of "Like a dog" where instead of translating 'fea' as 'ugly' he translates it as 'fat' – McWhirter manages to maintain the same voice of Aridjis' original, its elegance and flow.

Many of Aridjis' poems delve into mortality and what comes after death. Intensely spiritual without being religious, Aridjis' work follows the thread of that search for continuity and understanding of one's self. He pursues a personal, more mundane awareness of death and the passage of time ("Poem to the Sun") and finds peace in little vignettes of the supernatural that feel oddly commonplace. His forays are devoid of the fantastical without losing its spirituality, as when he meets the ghosts of his parents ("Meeting with my father in the orchard", "Meeting my mother in the old kitchen".) He even takes on the afterlife with a dose of humor in his "Recommendations for life as a ghost".

Aridjis dedicates several of his poems to the generation that will follow his and continue these ancestral echoes – his daughters Eva and Chloe – and after making



Solar Poems
Homero Aridjis
Translated by George McWhirter
City Lights, 2010

peace with the ghosts of the past launches into an examination of the grander scheme:

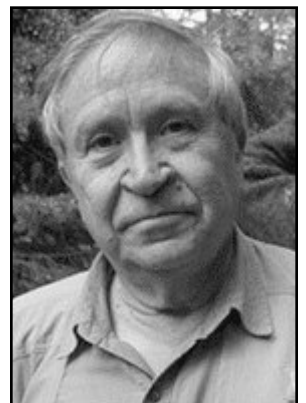
Let's think that after death/ the soul swims against the current/ and submerges in omnipresent memory./Let us suppose nothing falls away from us/ and images from the past surprise us/ in the sites of our (non)existence. (Let us unimagine Lethe)

Never far are the reflections of our impact on the world around us, not just from a metaphysical perspective but rather the environmental effect of humanity as a whole ("The hunter of the perfect kill"). Aridjis' environmentally themed poems are mournful elegies married with luscious and vivid imagery from Mexico's rich cultural heritage ("Brief Life", "The Jaguar", "The Sacred Couple", "The god"):

"The heart of the mountain no longer wears/ black and white markings on its chest/ nor does the volute, cloud of speech that names things,/scroll from his molten jaws./His mute cry/booms out/ my extinction." (The Jaguar)

Although there is the realization that the past can neither be revisited nor changed ("Train", "The ghost of the one you love") Aridjis' outlook is one more of reflection than melancholy: "Nothing to declare. Nothing to regret./ I have made it through the green door." (Through the green door). A passionate and uplifting selection of poems, *Solar Poems* leaves the reader thumbing through its pages again for nuances missed, and reflecting on one's own place in the jigsaw of life.

Originally from Colombia and a graduate of Simon Fraser University, Apis Teicher is a frequent contributor to PRRB. She writes from Port Coquitlam, B.C.



Homero Aridjis

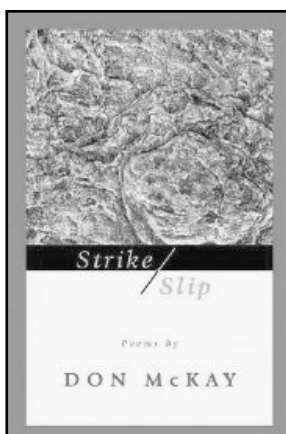
DARKER VOICES

Eric Miller

Iwant to praise at once the excellence of Don McKay's eleventh book of poetry, *Strike/Slip*. His superb syntax, ear, eye, vocabulary and wit are apparent in every poem. Having assumed the quality of his work, I would like to reflect more generally on *Strike/Slip* and on McKay's poetry.

To my mind, *Strike/Slip* stands in a moving relationship with McKay's breakthrough book, *Birding, or desire* (1983). *Birding, or desire* depicts a richly social world through which birds flit as emblems of liberty—a liberty that the speaker of the poems sometimes longs to have, and sometimes achieves. *Strike/Slip* echoes the earlier book. This is not evidence that McKay is tired. He returns to old themes in a new key. *Strike/Slip* is a sadder, a lonelier book. The warm social milieu of *Birding, or desire* has almost vanished, although affection for people remains. A preoccupation with geology supplements the gorgeous ornithology of *Birding, or desire*. Now McKay confronts mortality, in a more sustained and serious way than in some previous books. I like *Strike/Slip* very much. A poem such as "Abandoned Cable" is magnificent.

But, having the opportunity, I would like to articulate some cavils I have about McKay's work. They may be unjust. Certainly, they're a little strange. For example, I think that McKay comes across as too ethical. As an ecologist, McKay proposes a

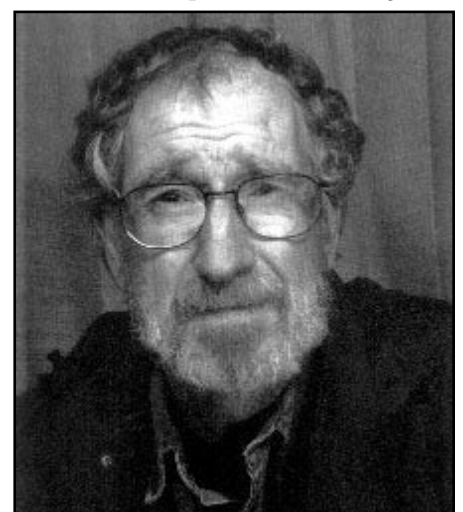


Strike/Slip
Don McKay
McClelland & Stewart
78 pages, \$17.99

morality of non-ownership. This decision to project humility and a certain kind of attentiveness is worthy in all ways. Yet its very worthiness makes it feel unliveable. And this is an ironic consequence, in a writer for whom being grounded is so important. The details in McKay are marvellous, varied and persuasive. The philosophy, however, can feel disjointed from the hard, dark side of the human heart. I exaggerate the defect to make it clear. The reader may sense that whole provinces of feeling simply do not register in McKay's verse. I love him in all the ways that I enumerate above. Yet I cannot wholly trust his writing. He will joke about the worst, or allude to it in passing. But delightful clowning, a fine circumstantiality, and the sheer speed of McKay's lines block the intrusion of darkness.

What I say has (even to my ears) the ring of unfairness. Of course McKay invites darkness into his verse at every turn. The question is therefore: "What kinds of darkness does he admit, and what kinds does he exclude?" Something is missing. Maybe Yeats caught it in the phrase, "the foul rag and bone shop of the heart". What a magnificent thing it would be, to bring together a real commitment to the environment with an honest psychology! Not that McKay is dishonest. That isn't the word for it. Perhaps I could put it this way. Though nobody evokes birdsong better than McKay, he is deaf to some of the darker voices in the soul's chorus. *Strike/Slip* may nevertheless represent an awakening to these voices.

Eric Miller's The Reservoir was short-listed for the 2007 Hubert Evans Prize; his new book of poetry, The Day in Moss, is forthcoming from Fitzhenry & Whiteside in 2008.



Don McKay

DANIEL P. MANNIX

Jim Christy

I was twenty-one years old and had met only two published writers. One was the man who lived near my aunt Louis in Petersburg, Virginia. He smoked a pipe and mowed his lawn and spent hours in front of a typewriter on his screened porch. His big adventure was a daily run to the Walnut Hill Shopping Center in his brand new four-door Ford. He churned out paperback originals about other people who lived in the suburbs.

The other was Joseph Hergesheimer a writer of a higher quality that I encountered at a gathering in West Chester, Pennsylvania. He was polite, if distant and stuffy. I thought writers should be just alighting from tramp steamers or leaving to catch one or, if not, ought to walk around in a fog bumping into things. I think this way.

My notion of writers was reaffirmed by selectively examining the twin volumes of World Authors. You may laugh at my naivete but I went from never having never read anything to Joseph Conrad, Francis Carco, Henri de Monfried and Albert t'Serteuens in a matter of a couple of weeks.

The third writer I ever met certainly did fit my romantic notion of what a writer should be. The only unfortunate thing about meeting Dan Mannix is that forty-three years later, I've still to meet his equal.

Having been on a year long road trip throughout the United States and into Canada, I returned to my old stomping grounds in Pennsylvania to enroll in college in order to avoid the draft. College was dull so I got a full-time job. I'd once run a foreign film society and I had a good driving record. Thus, I was able to get a position with the library driving a van and showing films at different branches in the county. I got extra hours as the relief bookmobile driver.

There was a good-looking woman named Ramona who worked at the main library. She was older, probably thirty. I couldn't think of her without hearing the lines in the Dylan song, "Ramona come closer and ..."

She asked about my first night showing movies. I'd been to a town called Parkesville and screened a 16mm. film on Quetico National Park in Ontario and another about strange animals of Central America. When I told her that I had enjoyed the experience and liked the films, she said, "It's my brother who made the Central American film."

I had never met a filmmaker, either.

"He's written several books, too. I hear you've worked in the carnival. So did my brother, Dan. Dan Mannix. He was the world's champion sword swallower and did a book about it. He's always bringing strange people around, magicians and half and halves. He had the human pin cushion over a few weeks ago."

This seemed so incredible to me. The library didn't carry his *Memoirs of a Sword Swallower* but did have two of his other books, one on foxes, the other called *Black Cargoes* that he wrote with Malcolm Cowley about the slave trade. I was further impressed that Mannix was friends with Cowley who had convinced Viking to publish Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*.

After I read *Black Cargoes*, I looked up Daniel Mannix in a biographical dictionary and came up with an idea that I hesitantly proposed to Ramona. I suggested that her brother might possibly come along with me when I showed his film. He could give a short talk and answer questions, and the whole thing would reflect well on the library. She got her brother's okay and the library director liked the idea.

In person, Mannix was as exotic as he had seemed when Ramona talked about him. He was about six-and-a-half feet tall, and seemed to have been everywhere and done everything, yet he didn't wield his experience like a weapon. He told his stories for the hell of it. When I said I had worked in carnivals, he threw some questions at me, probably to test me out, like "So in that last ten-in-one you worked, what was the

blow off?" or "You ever notice how the tip is bigger the farther you get from the east coast?"

We'd been tooling along the roads of Chester County of an evening, talking about pinheads and half-'n-halves, iguanas and armadillos. "Best way to cook an armadillo, saw this down in Guatemala," Mannix said, "is you poke a stick up its rear end at the back of the shell and roast him over the coals live. Simply delicious."

He got seemed to get a kick out of that, yet he was an animal lover and would stay up all night nursing the runt of a litter of puppies. On the other hand, he did write a book about torture.

Mannix told a story about being at a dinner party in New York City or maybe it was Key West. Malcolm Cowley had brought him along. Ernest Hemingway was there and so was William Saroyan. "After a couple of drinks, Hemingway became obnoxious. He began to bait a few of the other men but settled on Saroyan as his main catch. First, Hemingway wanted to arm wrestle, then wanted to put on the gloves with him. Saroyan mostly ignored him and, not getting the reaction he wanted, Hemingway started in on Bill's stories. I believe there had been some animosity in the past. Hemingway announced to all present that the men in Saroyan's stories were all sissies and cry babies. Bill told him to go out and play in his sandbox. Hemingway got up from the table then and knocked Saroyan's soup spoon out of his hand as he was raising it to his mouth. The soup sprayed those on either side of Saroyan. Bill merely asked the hostess for another spoon, and that really enraged Papa who yanked Bill's moustache, told him if he were a real man he wouldn't put up with that kind of treatment. Saroyan—he didn't even stand up, just raised in a sort of crouch—and let Hemingway have it. Knocked Hemingway clear across the room. Papa got up and stormed out of there."

One evening after our film presentation, Mannix stayed at his sister's house and the following day there he was knocking on the door of my apartment over a bakery. He invited me to his home, a large old-fashioned Main Line old money Philadelphia mansion, surrounded by five or so acres filled with animals. But it wasn't a farm.

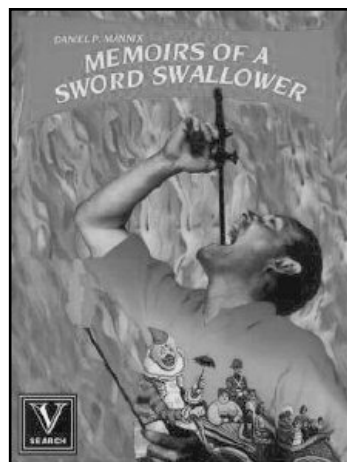
Instead of horses, cows and pigs, there were various breeds of reptiles and jungle cats. One shed was filled with stuffed animals and various weapons that appeared to have been left over from the Inquisition. Around his backdoor—in his dooryard, as they, including Walt Whitman, used to call it—grew all sorts of carnivorous plants.

We had drinks and Mannix talked about his friend William Lindsay Greshom, author of *Nightmare Alley*, and told me about his own sword swallowing experiences. Over the course of a few other meetings he gave me some instruction along that line. The thing is to train your throat muscles not to contract at the touch of the metal. A sharp, smooth sword works best because dust collects in the imperfections of a dull one and prompts the gag reflex.

Mannix had several outbuildings on the property and invited me to move into one of them if I wished. The one he had in mind for me was a sort of grandiose refurbished chicken coop adorned with an army cot, some spears and a shrunken head. I fancied living there, waking up in the morning and looking out at an alpaca who'd be looking in on me. I fancied hanging around with big Dan but I turned down the chance. It was politics. I considered myself a radical, a Jack London-Wobbly type of guy and thought I should be in the midst of the struggle instead of living out there in a jungle on the Main Line, figured I'd be too remote from the things that really mattered. Fool that I was. I did not understand what really mattered. So I missed out on the chance to know better the most interesting writer I would ever meet.

As Rudyard Kipling, a writer of whom Daniel Mannix was particularly fond would say, "So it goes."

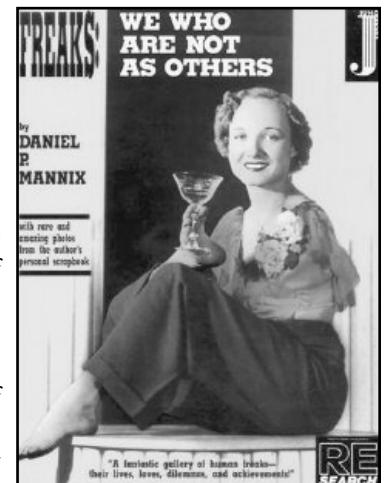
Jim Christy is a poet, novelist, essayist, world traveller and raconteur. He has published numerous essays, novels, collections of poetry and has released several Compact Discs of his poetry set to music.



Memoirs of a Sword Swallower



The Hellfire Club



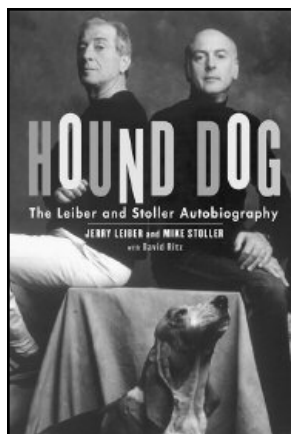
Frecks: We Who Are Not as Others

STORMY WEATHER

Joseph Blake



Stormy Weather
James Gavin
Atria Books,
598 pages hardbound,
\$34.99 Cdn.



Hound Dog
Jerry Leiber and Mike
Stoller with David Ritz
Simon & Schuster,
322 pages hardbound,
\$32.99 Cdn



Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller with Elvis Presley

Here are two very different books about the lives of very different pop music spectres. *Stormy Weather* is a brilliant, warts-and-all portrayal of the convoluted, troubled and ultimately transcendent life for Lena Horne. *Hound Dog* is a less scholarly book, a breezy, conversational telling of the lives of songwriters Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller.

David Ritz has collaborated on memoirs with Ray Charles and Aretha Franklin and wrote the definitive biography of Marvin Gaye. His deft, editorial hand frames Leiber and Stoller's narrative, letting them tell their story as simply as their three-minute, Zen masterpieces.

The songwriting team (Leiber wrote the words, Stoller the music.) began cranking out hits while still teenagers. *Kansas City*, *Hound Dog*, *Stand By Me*, *Jailhouse Rock*, *Yakety Yak*, *Poison Ivy*, and lots of other R&B and rock and roll hits followed in a long career that also includes the Broadway smash, *Smokey Joe's Café*.

Leiber and Stoller, aided by Ritz's judicious trimming, tell tall tales, name-drop, gossip, argue and kibitz back and forth about their lives both personal and professional. Reading *Hound Dog* feels like hanging out over drinks late into the evening with a pair of smart guys who have polished their routine for a long time. It doesn't feel false, but it's not much deeper than their juvenile pop masterpieces.

That said, they did write the poignant cabaret standard *Is That All There Is?* Phil Spector built his signature "Wall of Sound" while apprenticing with Leiber and Stoller; and songwriters Burt Bacharach and Hal David, Ellie Greenwich, Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil, Gerry Goffin and Carol King all were also nurtured and influenced by these guys during the dawning of rock and roll. Leiber and Stoller credit themselves with a seminal role as music producers, and they're probably right. They were definitely among the first producers in pop music, and their descriptions of the process of making three-minute magic are wonderful. Leiber and Stoller led charmed lives. In this telling their lives seemed almost preordained. I'm sure there is more to their story, but this is a pretty good, very entertaining introduction filled with insider information for the rock and roll fan.

James Gavin's biography of Lena Horne is a more scholarly, no less entertaining work. *Stormy Weather* is a nuanced probing of a very complicated woman with a lengthy, tangled career.

Now in her 90s and finally retired from show business, Horne was born and raised by her class-conscious, powerful grandmother in middle class, black Brooklyn. Gavin's biographical portrait of the family's racial, class and sexual dynamic grounds the book and Horne's life story in the history of slavery and race relations in America. The entertainer's light skin and totemic beauty sprung her from the Cotton Club chorus line and into a racially-stunted Hollywood career. Limited to beautiful, singing cameos that could be snipped from movies in the segregated South, Horne bleached her singing of any hint of soul. As Gavin describes it, "She sings with elocution school diction, clean and neat."



Lena Horne

Successful but miserable, Horne turned her frustration and rage into high art, first in supper clubs and Las Vegas and later more completely on Broadway. Gavin writes, "If her beauty had lured people in, Horne would taunt them with it, dangle it out of reach, just as film roles had been held out of hers. She found a way to use her torrid image as a weapon, not just an enticement."

Horne had many famous, white lovers, a pair of deeply flawed marriages, and sad relationships with her two children. The book describes infatuation with feminism and bouts of civil rights activism including support for Malcolm X. The essence of a difficult, high maintenance woman, Horne continued to battle demons bewitching her world and her divided heart as she aged.

By the end of her career, when I was lucky enough to see her acclaimed Broadway show, Horne sang from a deep place earlier music only hinted at. She drawled raunchily between songs and prowled the stage, finally comfortable with the body she had always felt uncomfortable with parading in public. Her long battle with show business and America was coming to an end, and it seemed Lena Horne had won.

Gavin's book tells how she did it and why, but in the end, it leaves as many questions as answers. That's what makes this more than a great, well-researched biography. Race, class, gender, art, and commerce in twentieth century America are viewed through the prism of Horne's life and career. It's a tangled, messy tale of tragedy and triumph. *Stormy Weather* is a great book.

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

WHAT UPDIKE MEANT (continued from page 25)

While she's in the ladies he cannot resist going into the shop and buying something to nibble, a Planter's Original Peanut Bar, the wrapper says. It was broken in two somewhere in transit and he thinks one half to offer his two grandchildren when they're all in the car heading home. It would make a small hit. But the first half is so good he eats the second and even dumps the sweet crumbs out of the wrapper into his palm and with his tongue eats them all up like an anteater. . . . As he tries with his tongue to clean the sticky brittle stuff, the caramelized sugar and corn syrup, from between his teeth—all his still, thank God, and the front ones not even crowned—Rabbit stares out at the big square of sunny afternoon. As the candy settles in his stomach a sense of doom regrows its claws around his heart: little prongs like those that hold a diamond solitaire.

We come finally to the little shadow under the intensity of appetite: its forbiddenness and its premonition of oblivion. You stuff yourself, but with something of your own negation.

(continued on page 41)

ADRIFT ON THE ARK

Vivien Lougheed

I love animal stories although I've read mostly contemporary tales like *Old Yeller* and *Lassie* and even some written from the animal's point of view like R.D. Lawrence's *White Puma* and Sid Marty's *Black Bear of Whiskey Creek*.

I'd never ready any bestiaries, which is how Thompson categorizes her book. I looked up the definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "a medieval moralizing treatise on beasts."

Moralizing is what a priest in a pulpit does and it makes me uncomfortable, but Thompson's moralizing is short and sweet. She states:

... a passionate awareness of nature [that] is a comfort, a reminder — in all the wreckage of human relations — of harmony and stability, the way things ought to be In the beginning, the old story tells us, the lion lay down with the lamb The image is a reminder of how far we humans have strayed from the ideal. Unless peaceful co-existence, harmony and moderation become our reality, we shall never see Eden again.

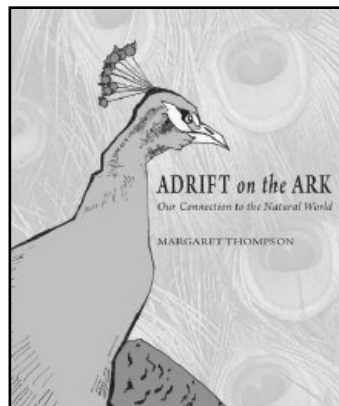
As she admits, this is faith. Scientific evidence shows that Eden never existed. What Thompson finds of it is in her suburb in Victoria or as a girl, in paths along the Thames that are home to swans and ducks. Green spaces and country lanes that have been cut off from the rest of the world are paradise, because nature has been almost totally subjugated there, capable only of minor infiltrations. And even these are controlled before they become uncomfortable for humans.

As an adult, living in Central BC, she faces the fact that nature is "red in tooth and claw" and that we have come too far from our animal roots to be able to cope with it. Thompson demonstrates the frailty of her arguments for peaceful co-existence with animals when they sabotage that peaceful co-existence as they often do beyond suburbia. This is best illustrated in her story about beavers on her property building a dam that causes a flood on her property and a sump pump to growl in her basement. She chops and cuts and saws the dam in an attempt to permit the flow of water. Her attempt to find "peaceful co-existence" is subverted by a family of beavers. Conservation officers are called in to kill them. Thompson says, "I could no longer pride myself on an acceptance of all living creatures; in the face of inconvenience and a threat to the value of my property I manifested exactly the draconian reaction I deplore in others."

The death of the beavers changed her life. All her rationalizing for the removal of the animals left her "tainted, contaminated by special pleading." She says that in her own view, she dwindled as a human being.

Consequently there are few illusions here regarding an actual balance with nature. Any balance has to be on human terms. In connection with animal stories, this was revealed when Teddy Roosevelt and some naturalists took on Ernest Thompson Seton, Jack London and Charles G D Roberts. The argument of the writers, that animals, to various degrees feel and think like humans and should therefore come under the 11th commandment "do unto others," was hard to defend.

Stories like those of Thompson's, about helping animals adapt to the human environment or about seeing them as acting according to human feelings were regarded as foolish.



Adrift on the Ark
Margaret Thompson
Brindle & Glass Publishing,
2009



Margaret Thompson

In most of her stories Thompson struggles to deal with those expats from nature living in her neighborhood. She mudds up her car so a male peacock will stop attacking its own image. She fights to protect "cat's" brood of youngsters from the predations of a "ginger tom, hunger on four legs, prowling as relentless and cold as a shark." As with the beavers, it's hopeless. "The cat twined about my legs... I knew she expected me to help."

Here Roosevelt would jump in kicking, pointing out that this is just to prolong cat's agony and that Thompson is misinterpreting the cat's response to her presence. Yet Roosevelt himself was, as Thompson notes in her chapter "Arctophilia" (on bears), admired for his insistence on "humane" killing of any animals wounded in the hunt, and he may even have been the creator of the teddy bear: "there are two stories: servants console Roosevelt on a trophy-less day with a stuffed bear they have made [or Roosevelt] refuses to kill a small bear his guides manage to capture...."

One fact is that we begin as children to relate to animals as if they were human. Thompson reiterates this. The second fact is that, as pet lovers know, mammals at least are close to humans, experiencing feelings of anxiety, loneliness, love and loyalty. This is what first attracted me to animal stories and what motivated me to spend my entire adult life with one dog after another.

The third fact is that Roosevelt's idea about wild animals being in the way of progress (like Thompson's beavers) may be dangerous. The evolutionary superiority of humans over all life is not a certainty. We're still involved in a serious war with viruses, bacteria and insects to claim top spot.

Thompson touches on this in her chapter, "Phobia." We have a visceral fear of insects that goes a long ways back and cannot be overcome by reason. They attack our food and we respond with pesticides that may do irreparable damage to our supply of all food. We develop resistant species of plants and bacteria that create more complex threats.

A final fact is that we often discover that we have uses for life forms previously considered irrelevant to progress. Occasionally they are allies in our battle with insects, viruses and bacteria.

In short, some kind of armistice seems called for. Total victory, as Roosevelt saw it, may be suicide. In the bible, Noah, "adrift on the ark" as Thompson's title has it, is responsible for every beast and fowl "to keep the seed alive upon the face of all the earth." It's not recorded how Noah was supposed to have done this, but Thompson shows us some possibilities. Sometimes it doesn't go well but she has her orders. Sometimes she actually finds a great way of carrying those orders out.

Vivian Lougheed, an intrepid traveler, has published articles in *Above and Beyond*, *Geist*, *Grit*, *Room of One's Own*, and *Up Here*. She lives in Prince George, BC.

WHAT UPDIKE MEANT (continued from page 40)

Later, even closer to death, Rabbit looks up from his heart bypass operating table and sees on a video screen his own horrific viscera, "the pulsing wet tubes we inherited from the squid." Harry is reassured that his doctor is Jewish, having a

Gentile prejudice that Jews do everything a little better than other people, something about all those generations crouched over the Talmud and watch-repair tables, they aren't as distracted as other persuasions, they don't expect to have as much fun. They stay off the booze and dope and have a weakness only . . . for broads.

We get Harry's immediate assessment of his surgeon's vices, but only after we've sailed around the room a little, flitting omnisciently within the purely authorial, purely sociological adumbration of the character.

At the reading, Updike finally layed down the copper-jacketed book and talked awhile with a writer from the *L.A. Times Book Review*. All his observations were witty, generous, self-deprecating, and in the words of his own epitaph for his beloved editor William Maxwell, "funny and wise and kind and true." He finished with a gush of enthusiasm about the newly-elected Obama, clasping his hands together, appearing to rise up out of his chair like one of his early cartoon whiffenpoofs. Then he took a series of mostly inept audience questions, steering each gracefully toward a cognizable answer. The inevitable what-are-you-working-on eventually arrived, and for once he really didn't have a thought-through response. He shrugged his shoulders, slapped his palms on his knees, and said "I'll only say I intend to stay in this writing business until I drop over dead." And lucky for us, by God, he did.

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

FALSEWORK

Martin VanWoudenberg

On June 17, 1958, Vancouver's Second Narrows Bridge collapsed while under construction, and eighteen men lost their lives in an instant. Fifty years after the catastrophe, Gary Geddes presents *Falsework*, a collection of perspectives on the event. With his own father called in as a diver to search for bodies in the wreckage, and himself having worked on the waterfront the afternoon that news of the tragedy broke, Geddes has a strong connection to the accident – a kinship to the survivors and those who died in one terrifying moment. But how best to create a fitting testament and account of what happened?

With legwork, Geddes makes the voices of the survivors, investigators, reporters, and divers available to us. He casts his net wide, bringing in many such stories and perspectives. This collection is packed with unique accounts, drawn from many interviews, photographs, and news archives. Geddes, however, does not turn these offerings into a litany of straightforward personal accounts. That would hardly be poetry, or interesting.

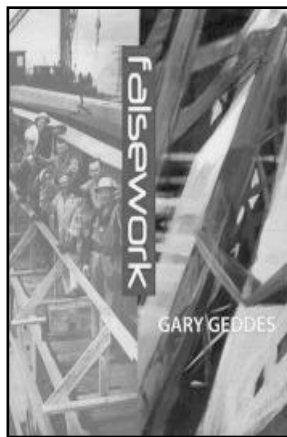
The challenge Geddes faces as poet is how to bring this historic disaster home to those who were not even alive at the time it happened. Those who recall, or personally experienced the bridge collapse accident are already a dwindling percentage. For a book like *Falsework* to succeed, it must bring the past to new life. As Geddes states in his introduction, "Poetry is 'the bridge suspended between history and truth.'" Rather than presenting stale reminiscences, what we get is a compendium of raw and vibrant perspectives from diverse angles. Asking for his audience's sanction, the poet takes artistic license in how these perspectives are presented, creating single vibrant characters from multiple impressions and remembrances. The result is a collection where every page has something new to offer and something fresh to consider—from the workers who dangle on lines like puppets, to the wives who voice their frustrations at a husband always gone; and from the widows truly alone now, to the investigators looking for somewhere to pin the blame. All divergent thoughts converge in this collection, powerful because of its incongruity, honest in its portrayals.

Geddes also does far more than just focus on the accident itself. He weaves in a cast of characters that immediately feels both alive and real. We begin the book with a steel worker who takes a Woodward's girl to look at the growing expanse, and finds her far more impressed with the bridge than his carnal intents. We travel on and overhear the fight between a worker and a foreman on just how unsafe the falsework that temporarily holds the steel in place really is. Soaring into the air, an immigrant worker is judged on neither his accent nor his country of origin, but only on whether he could "set steel and catch a red-hot rivet between his teeth." Set back on the ground, a bald supervisor cusses out a line of workers who clamber the framework with a source of deep pride in their craftsmanship, and an easy love for the "first-class bastard but one helluva / fine worker, with the scars to prove it." The camera moves quickly and seemingly effortlessly from one life to the next.

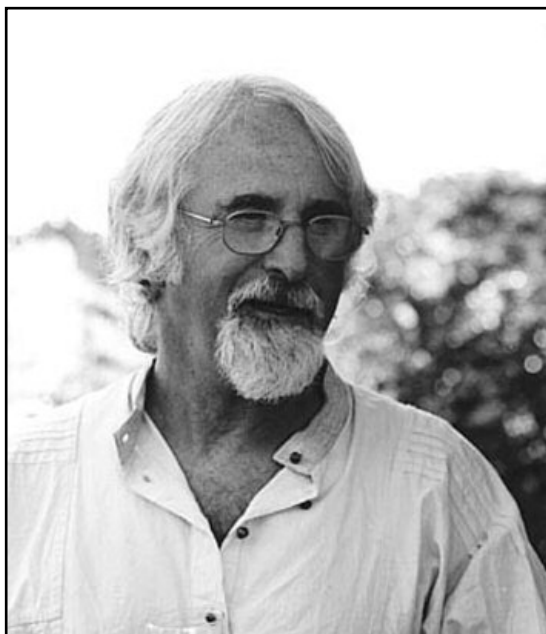
Geddes crafts his poetry on a technical level that matches these unconventional and often disjointed experiences. Lines start and stop with apparent random intent. There's a crosswork of rhythms and themes that appears at first unplanned, until we step back to survey the construction as a whole. Each period is a rivet, each image an I-beam, and slowly the entire bridge takes shape. By the book's final pages, we can look back and see how we've crossed the expanse and taken in the view. We've stood on the deck and on the girders. We've stepped into the lunchroom and the bar. We've stood on the rocky shore and on the well-cut grass of the cemetery lawn. Most importantly, we've connected; it is our history now.

But what of the dead, those who did not make it but instead found their one instant of pure terror ending in a sickening splash or thud? Geddes does not neglect these stories either, and it is here that his collection shines the brightest. As countless others have expressed, literature and poetry is about giving a voice to the voiceless. This is, after all, the task of the poet; its vital truth, as Plato said. Making his characters real and alive, Geddes drops us along with those eighteen men. Now, as we plummet with them into freezing water, a ton of steel entering the waves a millisecond behind us, it all matters. As a reader, I found

(continued on page 46)

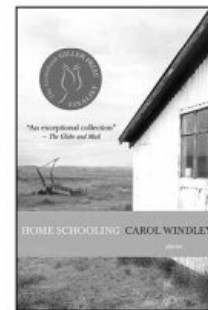


Falsework,
Gary Geddes.
Goose Lane Editions.
\$ 19.95



Gary Geddes

WHAT IS IT ABOUT WEST COAST WOMEN AND FICTION?



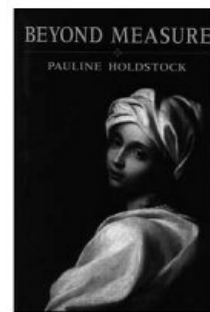
Praise for Giller Prize Finalist Carol Windley

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



Praise for Linda Rogers

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RED ZONE

Trysh Ashby-Rolls

For three years poet Kim Goldberg walked through a Nanaimo underpass on her way to the library without noticing what society mostly views as *anonymous curbside detritus*/ When she registered *these wads of damp / of done for / of gone / of lives tied up tied out of sight / of anonymous lumpenkind /* the invisible became visible. She found homeless people dossing in the park, behind the Thrift Store, *in a kilter cardboard city / cobbled from flattened boxes, damp bedding, deck chairs...*/ Last winter she discovered several people crawled behind a retaining wall they reached by way of a tunnel they had dug in the sand. *Homeless people roost here too*, Goldberg writes, *in their hibernaculum behind the wall, while the Island Highway mutters them to sleep.*

Officially, there are 300 homeless people living on the streets of the downtown core. Officially, because an Outreach Team tasked with monitoring them counts their numbers. Yet the population of Nanaimo is “in the region of 88, 000,” according to City Hall staff. Whether those without homes are part of the 88, 000 is moot. “They are also members of our community,” says Goldberg. “You can’t just look away and pretend they don’t exist.”

Although she did not set out to write a verse map of street people, Goldberg—who has written five previous books—wanted to raise awareness of the issue. Her new book, RED ZONE, is a 150-page compendium of poems, photos, artist projects and journal entries that document Nanaimo’s shadow world: its back alleys, graffiti galleries, squats and homeless camps.

The book takes its title from an area within this downtown core known as the ‘red zone’. Depending upon whom you ask, this area is anything from “four or five blocks” to “forty blocks.” What is indisputable is that Provincial Court judges have the authority to ban those convicted of drug trafficking from this four or forty blocks at the time of sentencing. Yet, police pick up and kick out homeless people with no previous convictions who are not “red-zoned.” Apparently the judges and city fathers are unaware that trafficking drugs goes needle in hand with addiction to opiates. The needle exchange is only one service inside the red zone. So are the Women’s Resource Centre, the homeless shelter, thrift store, soup kitchen, Aids Vancouver Island and the health centre where a methadone treatment program, SDT testing, counselling and



RED ZONE
poems of homelessness & urban decay
Kim Goldberg
September 2009
Pig Squash Press
150 pages, 60+ photos
\$18.95

education services for addicts are in place.

Toward the middle of her book, Kim Goldberg ventures into an even more shadowy place: that of memory buried deep in the heart of another, personal red zone. *I did not mean to rip the blanket door off this particular cubicle*, she writes. In ‘Working Theory’, she explains:

*All knowledge is retrospective
self-reflexive, a puffed tin of
sardines gone off, a bloody head trauma waiting
to be washed raw, flushed, stuffed tight
with cool grey staghorn moss then sutured
shut by sentence fragments & dangling
particle colliders. I rode that
compound bus to the river bend
til I got busted with no ticket ...*

A judge in Coos county, Oregon, where Goldberg lived as an adolescent, grew tired of her shenanigans and sentenced her to a three-year ban from a 1,600 square mile zone that surrounded her home, her school, her life. She pushed down the rage from her court-mandated ostracism, until the exterior and interior red zones collided in a surge of shame and pain as she bore witness to the men and women in the red zone of Nanaimo. The political became the personal, although she asserts that she *can no longer discern where the political ends and the personal begins.*

Goldberg is a skilled and skilful writer. Never once does she go emotionally over-the-top, although it would be easy to do so, given the subject matter. Her language alternates between street smart, whimsical, journalistic, and her own invented words. Throughout the book, there runs the kind of humour that goes with survival: photos of a silly little dog wearing an oversized coat and licking its chops; a sign above the Salvation Army’s New Hope Centre—“Be an organ donor. Give your heart to Jesus.”



Kim Goldberg

Trysh Ashby-Rolls is the author of Triumph: A Journey of Healing from Incest, reissued under The Writers’ Union of Canada’s imprint, Phoenix Books, and recently completed The Left-Behind Dad: A Father’s Search for his Missing Children.

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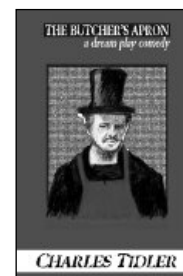
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(drama) 21.95
published 2008 80 pages



Charles Tidler – The Butcher’s Apron

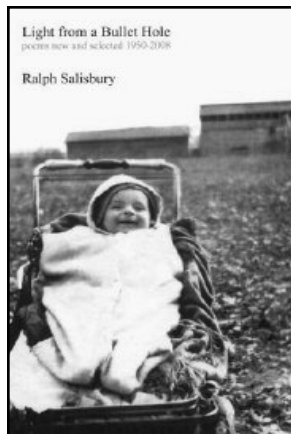
In this two-act comedy dream play, Charles Tidler presents an alchemical and absurdist portrait of the visionary Swedish playwright August Stringberg, who pursues a doppelganger that has chopped out his heart to Berlin, where he discovers that his double has fallen head-over-heels in love with the young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

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(drama) 18.95
published 2006 120 pages



LIGHT FROM A BULLET HOLE

James D. Sullivan



Light from a Bullet Hole: Poems New and Selected 1950-2008
Ralph Salisbury
Silverfish Review Press
2009, 177 pp.
\$19.95 US

If you realize that the great blessings of your life have come to you as the result of a great crime committed many generations ago, what responsibility do you bear? What can you do about it?

Ralph Salisbury's ninth collection of poetry *Light from a Bullet Hole: Poems New and Selected 1950-2008* surveys the rich career of a writer Arnold Krupat calls in his introduction a "Cherokee humanist and indigenous cosmopolitan." Early in his career, he mastered a technical device that would allow him to contain those multitudes. He writes long sentences of sinuous syntax that use line and stanza breaks to jar the grammar, shove the meaning in another direction, or wedge another clause into exactly the place where it can make the most expansive connection. This linguistic mastery allows him to begin a thought and then suspend more and more of its implications in a grammatical solution before a period finally strikes it into an encompassing whole.

As a reward for having survived duty on a bomber crew in World War II, he received a GI Bill education at University of Iowa, where teachers such as Paul Engle and Robert Lowell taught him how the poetic line can compress language and, like oil from an olive, press fresh

meanings from it. For example, from his first book *Ghost Grapefruit* (1972), the poem "Though Come for Beauty, I":

*the driver in this United States
park, find
terror—the highway writhing,
a cobra, sloughing white skin, rising
from basket-work trees, turned twigs, two miles,
bewitched by white mates bombers uncoil,
the sun plunging into my eyes,
my wife and children dangling at
my side, my back, and from
ten nails driven against the chrome cross
of the driver's wheel, that thin
plastic horizon, whose atoms hold all of Eden
we are ever apt to tumble from
or to.*

Here, he is concentrated upon the intense emotion of a single moment. But here is a passage of a later poem from *War in the Genes* (2006); the moment is full of implications that stretch off into the past and the future:

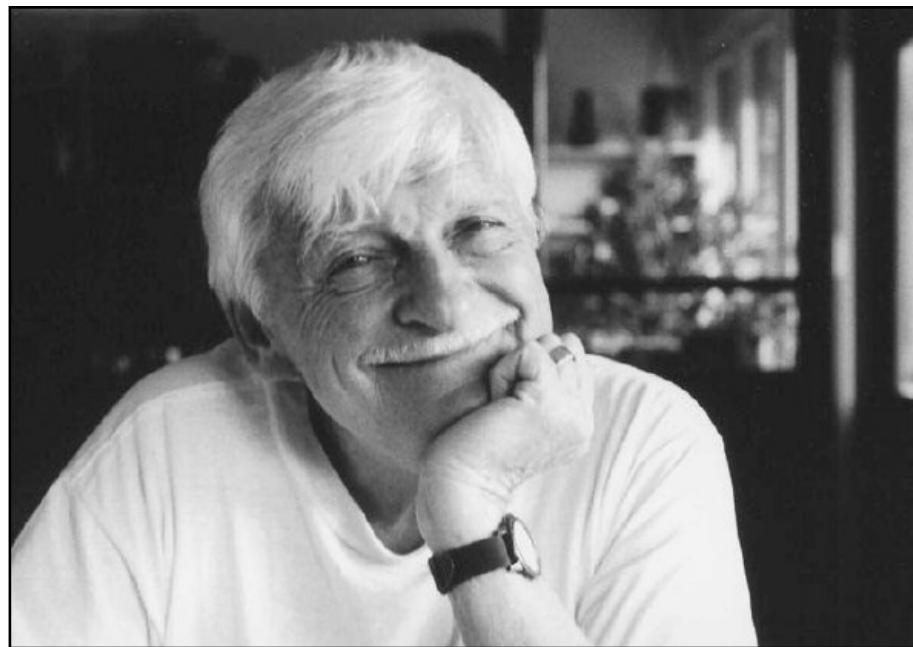
*Manila's fibers conquered by Japan,
and the Mayan peninsula's sisal-rope
tripping a body bigger than Dad's,*

*our herd-boar struck earth, a three-hundred pound bomb's
explosions of dust becoming mud on my tongue,*

*as I helped to hold down generations of tons
enraged that they would not ever be born,*

*my father's knife reducing their sire's
answers for sows' desires to
the lowest common-denominator,
plant-fertilizer, the remainder shoat-meat,
removal of testicles having made dinners
sweeter for genteel tables.*

It's not just the castration of a boar, but the end-use of fibers imported from tropical



Ralph Salisbury

places, a prolepsis toward bombs dropped later in the poet's life, and a class marker between those who do this dirty work and those for whom not just this one pig, but all his future generations have been sacrificed to make a nice meal.

What is most valuable about Salisbury's poetry is his awareness of all the contingencies, personal and historical that have led up to his present moment as well as the present contingencies that create the future. We live in the future the past has created, and every moment is a historical choke-point that cuts off or creates other possible futures. In writing about his heart surgery, he thinks backward toward contingencies that have led up to and then beyond that moment. He addresses his heart:

*Old Slave, blind pumper at the well,
one brother already dead,
you kept me alive,
through hunger and fever, to chop ice
and save cattle from thirst.*

*Their milk sustaining my, and, thus
my children's children's destinies,*

He also wouldn't be here to write if he hadn't acted quickly and saved the bomber crew when a bomb came loose on the aircraft; if he hadn't, before that, managed to shoot a deer his family, living in Depression-era rural poverty, had needed to survive; if he hadn't survived, still earlier, a fever his grieving father had been sure would kill him.

And that's just his own life. The contingencies stretch back through the life of his story-telling father (one of the main characters in these poems) who would not have gotten out of prison to have sons if he hadn't been pardoned for killing a man in self-defense, his father's Cherokee-Shawnee mother who raised three mixed-race children on her own, and his mother's Irish family that included the grandfather whose white-haired face Salisbury sees whenever he looks in a mirror.

The contingencies Salisbury addresses reach all the way to the earliest European/American encounters. Walter Raleigh shows up as a character in several poems. After traveling to America, he reported back to Queen Elizabeth

*Much game, fields, richer, even, than ours
once were, surrounding well-built towns—
and many women quite light-skinned—
God's Truth, Your Majesty,
in but one generation, civilization can begin.*

Raleigh was proposing to destroy native culture via interbreeding. And Salisbury acknowledges that he is the beneficiary of Raleigh's project. Because of it, he has, in

adulthood, his pleasant and prosperous life. In his pivotal poem “A Debt” from *A White Rainbow* (1985), he encompasses both the crime and what benefit he’s received from it:

*Chrome toaster magnifying mirror for
bananas and apples
leopard seals balancing red circus balls
on brown-spotted, yellow, pointed heads—all
the clutter of this warm room—bright
lure if anyone is prowling this rainy night—all
of my home, this poem, my toddler daughter,
my wife’s breath shaped by the hollow in my pillow—all
are owing, partly, to
an Englishman swaggering out of a line,
while a comrade holds his gun, and a Cherokee woman
yanked from another line.*

To each point of contingency he owes all that he has, which means he owes everything to that crime. What, therefore, is his responsibility to that anonymous woman assaulted so long ago?

Most importantly, he makes the choice of identifying with his Cherokee ancestors whom Raleigh planned to overwhelm: “as civilized/and Christianized as/explosions and sperm could make them.” He is, after all, a “Genetic survivor of Andrew Jackson’s war/To exterminate The Cherokee.” That status offers a burden he could, if he chose, decline. He could pass, but he chooses to accept that identification in defiance of the likes of Raleigh and Jackson. He can’t let them win.

*I have an English name,
a German-Chilean-American wife
and could live a white life,*

*but, with this hand,
with which I write, I dug,
my sixteenth summer, a winter’s supply of yams out*

*of hard, battlefield clay,
dug for my father’s mother, who—
abandoned by her husband—raised,
alone, a mixed-blood family
and raised—her tongue spading air—
ancestors, a winter’s supply or more.*

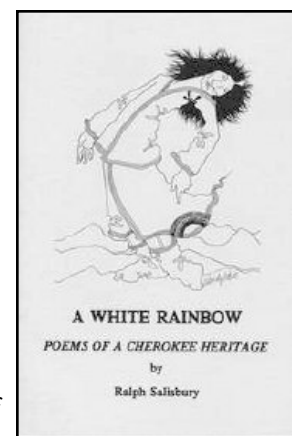
So he takes his English name and etymologizes it “in languages mostly lost” into something Indian sounding: “Wise Wolf Salt Town”

Not that he therefore rejects his European ancestry. As he wrote in his Preface to *Rainbows of Stone* (2000), “I would give all of my love to my Indian people and all of my love to my white people. I am not part Indian, part white, but wholly both.” This is where his poetic technique of suspending disparate elements in syntax comes in handy—a way to contain and include all the conflict and fruit of the “war in the genes.”

*My Cherokee dad sang my Irish mom
an English courting-song,
with no apparent anger about
invasion, torture and massacre—his peace-pipe filled
with Sir Walter Raleigh pipe tobacco*

His own family has been the fruit of imperialism, and so his critique is tragic, rather than righteous. And this means he must oppose American wars of empire in Vietnam and Iraq. Though he’s now eighty-three, his work is, therefore, not yet done.

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



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Yolande Villemaire



Yolande Villemaire est née au Québec et remporte en 1980 le Prix des Jeunes écrivains du Journal de Montréal pour son roman *La vie en prose*, qu'on qualifia d'oeuvre féministe et postmoderne. Poète et romancière, elle publie une dizaine de recueils de poésie dont la rétrospective *D'ambre et d'ombre* en 2000 et dix romans, dont *La déferlante d'Amsterdam* en 2003 et *India, India* à XYZ en 2007. Elle a vécu à New York, à Paris et à Amsterdam, mais aussi en Inde. Sa poésie est traduite en anglais, en espagnol, en italien, en roumain, en néerlandais, en catalan et en islandais. Elle vit à Montréal. Son recueil *Céleste triste* a été réédité en 2006 aux Écrits des Forges en coédition avec Le Temps des Cerises en France.



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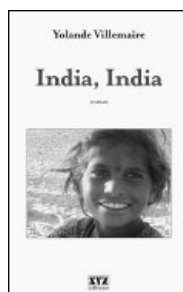
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SOUL SHAPING: ADVENTURES IN SELF CREATION *Lu Bianco*

You're not going to buy this book. But you're hearing about it here and soon you'll see someone else reading it at a bus stop or waiting for the ferry. One day it will be put in front of you and if you open it you will realize that the book was a long time coming.

It took a month for me to open this book. I walked by a homeless guy hocking them from his shopping cart on the street, twice. Then Leila, my video shop owner was reading a copy, which I snatched to peruse a paragraph while she found *The Wrestler*. "We are each here as part of the sacred dance, stepping on each other's toes turning each other toward God, one clumsy step at a time." - Jeff Brown. I asked her if I could rent her book. She gave me a copy that the author had given her because she seemed like a giving person. Here in Toronto there were 2800 fans of this book in a Facebook group talking about it while it was still only self-published and less than 6 months old. When I finally met Jeff he said the book had a will of its own.

What hooked me into this book is that it's the story of a guy as he stumbles through the turmoil and confusion of his life and begins to hear the voice of his soul. One of my weaknesses is sci-fi or fantasy stories with a youthful protagonist who discovers their destiny and against all odds perseveres, irreverently, blossoming into their fulfillment: *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Enders Game* etc. Imagine that you have a destiny, and your soul knows and is trying to tell you; but you aren't able to hear your soul from all the distractions of life. How unsettling is that idea?

Soulshaping is Jeff Brown's story, his journal as he chases his destiny. It is a clumsy and personal journey. I'll skim Eckart Tolle in the *Common Ground* and bits of Deepak Chopra books that people have on their shelf. But I can't buy them for the same reason I can't hang out with my old Judo Sensei for too long: they're coaching all the time. This book is different. It is vulnerable, authentic and magical. Already it has made me listen inwardly and have courage to face my dreams again. It is one of those books that makes you believe you're here for a reason. I think we all need one of these to have in our hearts and readily available to pass on to friends or acquaintances when they need them.



Jeff Brown

A former world-ranked Olympic wrestler, Lu Bianco writes from Toronto.

FALSEWORK (continued from page 42)

myself surging faster, almost desperately, towards the next page. As I broke the surface, I shivered. When I completed the stories, took in the photos that dot the pages, and re-walked many of the expanses, I felt the need to weep.

"You're a suck," my wife says, herself immune to poetry. I disagree. "These are my people now. It's right to mourn them." Only then do I realize just what Geddes, a master craftsman, has accomplished. My heart silently thanks him. Yours, should you embrace this opportunity, will too.

Martin VanWoudenberg is a frequent contributor to PRRB. He writes from Aldergrove, B.C.



*Soul Shaping:
Adventures in Self
Creation*
Jeff Brown
Pipik Press, 2009

LOST SOULS AND MEAN STREETS

Paul Falardeau

There are many reasons to read a good book: its plot, its characters, the information within the pages. Less often however, a book challenges the reader with the pure inventiveness and unusual approach to literature. With this in mind, think of names like Irvine Welsh, Malcolm Lowry, Anthony Burgess and Gautam Malkani. Another that should come to mind, especially for readers in Canada, is Dennis E. Bolen whose newest book, *Kaspoit!* pushes the boundaries of how we write and read modern literature.

Bolen's style is unique. The story is told almost entirely through dialogue, with actions and settings told only with short one word phrases and onomatopoeia such as the book's title, *Kaspoit!*, the sound made (according to Bolen) of a can of beer opening. The rest of the narration is told through the conversations between characters.

Or rather, it is hinted at. There is really no narration, this is basically a pared-down movie script. This may be the sticking point for some readers who will undoubtedly find *Kaspoit!* difficult to read. And it is. The first few pages give no help in discerning who is speaking, where they are, what they are doing or who they are. But after persevering through the first few pages, the reader becomes acclimatized to the strange writing style and is rewarded with an incredibly immersive story.

The sole use of dialogue and short descriptive terms forces the reader to not only passively view the characters but to become them in order to speak and understand their dialogue. In this way the reader becomes the narrator, projecting the details of the story for themselves.

This reader participation may be the strongest feature of Bolen's novel, and the most necessary. The plot eventually unfolds into a story of lawless Vancouver streets, patrols by cynical cops, and lost souls. The sad tale has unabashed parallels to real life crimes from the city's streets which should be obvious to most readers, stories which Bolen is justified in telling as he has served twenty-three years as a federal parole officer on the streets of Vancouver.

Still, this book is not a judgment or a play by play account, but a plea. Bolen offers a gripping and terrifying account of the male psyche that is the driving force behind the grotesque acts at play on Vancouver's streets. The book steps into the minds of the men who commit such heinous crimes and without pushing or suggestion, lets the reader watch and feel all the pain, the horror therein. As such the language can become violent, vulgar and at times sickening.

The title is *Kaspoit!* and it makes perfect sense. The book is a study in the extremes that men can fall to when their lusts and emotions are allowed to go the extreme. What could be more indicative of macho male aggression than cracking open beer after beer?

Bolen has created a work that is truly worth reading. Its literary approach, again, is unique and after some orientation, surprisingly readable. This is a story to take heed of, one that undoubtedly deserves attention.

Paul Falardeau is student at the University of the Fraser Valley, where he is studying English and Biology. He lives in nearby Aldergrove and is the arts and life editor for The Cascade in Abbotsford. He is a programmer and DJ for CIVL radio. He recently wrote a essay for and co-edited UFV's research review.



Kaspoit!
Dennis E. Bolen
Anvil Press, 2009
258 pp., \$20.00



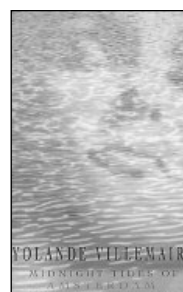
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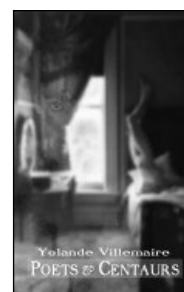


Quebec poet and novelist Yolande Villemaire has published widely in various genres. Her work (poems, literary criticism, radio dramas, novels) moves from its experimental days, in such reviews as *Hobo/Québec* and *Cul-Q*, to the development of a neorealism acclaimed by critics. Yolande Villemaire lives in Montreal, but has made extended visits to locations throughout the globe.

All titles translated by Leonard Sugden.



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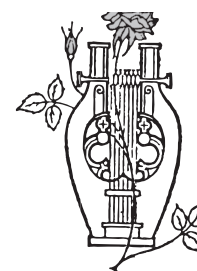
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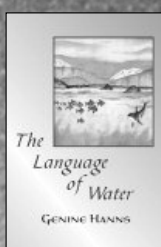
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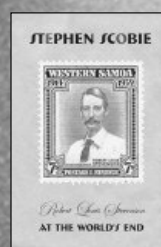
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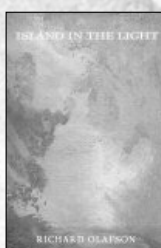
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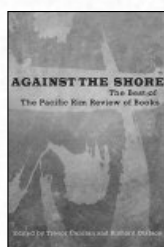
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