

PRRB the Pacific Rim Review of Books

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**MADELEINE THIEN
DO NOT SAY
WE HAVE NOTHING**

**SHAUNA SINGH BALDWIN
RELUCTANT REBEL**



**ARVIND MEHROTRA: AN APPRECIATION
BY ANDREW SCHELLING**

**A POST-APOCALYPTIC DAYTRIP IN
AMSTERDAM NOORD**

**HILARY TURNER ON
DAPHNE MARLATT'S SVEVA**

**THE DAYS BY M.A.C.FARRAT
REVIEWED BY JULIA DOVEY**

THREE NEW POEMS BY PETER DALE SCOTT

**THE GREAT CLOD, A SAKURA TIME INTERVIEW
WITH GARY SNYDER, BY TREVOR CAROLAN**

BEV SELLARS WARRIORS UP IN *PRICE PAID*

PLUS:

**BOB'S NOBEL PRIZE, PATTI SMITH, BLAISE CENDRARS, *THE
ART OF MARY FILER*, ROB TAYLOR'S *THE NEWS*, KIM
GOLDBERG, JOE ROSENBLATT, BILL BISSETT, MEREDITH
QUARTERMAIN'S *U GIRL***



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Box 8474 Main Postal Outlet

Victoria, B.C., Canada V8W 3S1

email: editor@prrb.ca

phone & fax: (250) 385-3378

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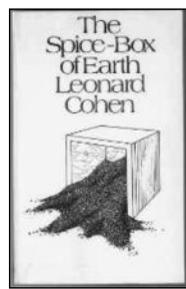
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This issue of the
Pacific Rim Review of Books
is dedicated to the memory of
Leonard Cohen
(1934-2016).



Stranger Music:
Selected Poems &
Songs
McClelland &
Stewart



Spicebox of Earth
Random House

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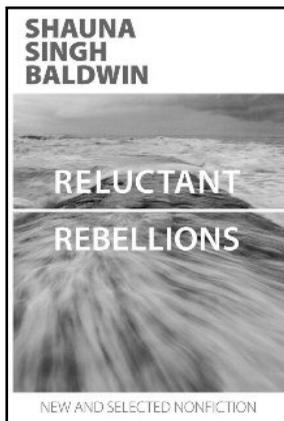
DISPATCHES FROM A RELUCTANT REBEL

Katie Stobbart

To hear a person read aloud allows a story to breathe and truly speak. The words inhabit the hands, mouth, and lungs of their reader, adopting the cadence and resonance allowed by the body in the oral delivery of language. Shauna Singh Baldwin's collection of 15 speeches and essays is best served to the ear, which gives full weight and nuance to its stories and calls to action. With its calm certainty and conviction about the way forward, Baldwin's oral presentation at a reading of the work recently has stayed in my ear.

Through well-researched discourse informed by personal experience, Baldwin explores culture, gender, race, and religion, showing how cultural contexts and stories of the past have led us to where we are today. It can be tempting to hold a book like this aloft and say, gesticulating, "This! This is what is happening right now." We can read *Reluctant Rebellions* in light of an impending Donald Trump presidency and related shifts in the global political landscape, we can read it in light of the refugee crisis and our approaches to immigration and multiculturalism, and we can sink the prose like an anchor into our present waters, which may seem increasingly bleak. But we should also allow a book like this to be timeless; the problems Baldwin enumerates are not new, but deeply embedded in our cultures, our authoritative bodies, and our own bodies. As Baldwin illustrates in *Reluctant Rebellions*, particularly in the essays "Re-forming Our Epics" and "Mind-Dancing with Language," we can trace modern attitudes and ways of conveying cultural ideas back to some of our earliest and longest-living texts.

While Baldwin discusses religion and race, the conversation in *Reluctant Rebellions* is especially centered on gender. But where the feminist movement is sometimes criticized for its focus on white, middle-class women to the exclusion of others, Shauna Singh Baldwin is, as she might say, a bridge; she has both a North



Reluctant Rebellions
Shauna Singh Baldwin
UFV Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies, 2016 paper, 151 pages



Shauna Singh Baldwin

American and South Asian cultural context to draw from in her assessment of challenges facing women and men in patriarchal society. Perhaps one of the strongest passages demonstrating this is the one confronting the idea of Sikh feminism, in which she presents a compelling counterargument for those who claim feminism is an exclusively Western movement:

If feminism is so Western, it should now have achieved parity with men for Western women. If feminism is so Western, Western women should be now have control over their bodies and reproduction. If feminism is so Western, Western women should never be targets of domestic or gun violence, or rape. If feminism is so Western, women in the 'developed' countries should receive the same pay as similarly qualified men, family names should be passed down by mothers, and illegitimacy should be an anachronism.

Equality among genders, as Baldwin repeatedly supports throughout her book, is not yet a reality in any culture. We negate and diminish supposedly "feminine" qualities like compassion and sharing; we use ultrasound technology to prevent girls from being born; and we block women's ability to make choices about our life choices and our own bodies. I say "we" because regardless of culture, race, religion, or gender, we are all individually and collectively responsible for change. But how do we change? How do we strive for justice? Baldwin's argument suggests we should do so in part by altering our way of thinking, and by changing our stories. She writes of stories as sources of guidance in the face of great challenges.

Stories show us how to overcome obstacles, how to live in the face of suffering, tyranny, illness, loss, or grief, and what we can become. So we need them".

As you might expect from an author of several books of fiction, story is one of the main vehicles for Baldwin's discourse in *Reluctant Rebellions*. She begins with story, she uses it to illustrate her strongest claims, and she gestures to story and stories as integral tools in the reluctant rebellions she urges her readers toward

I think of myself as someone who rebels, who pushes back upon encountering injustice. But there are instances—as there are for everyone—when I've failed to do so, when my inner rebel has failed to win over the appeal of staying silent, the appeal of safety from the consequences of speaking or acting. This is what makes the kind of rebellion Baldwin talks about in her book difficult: rebelling can challenge our own sense of security. But it is a false sense of security, and the consequences of complicity are ultimately far worse than those of speaking up.

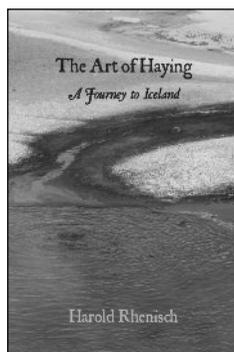
In a story, characters are strong when they make things happen, instead of remaining passive. In a sentence, active voice is stronger than passive voice; active voice requires a subject performing an action. We can take this lesson from language and from story to direct ourselves on a path of strength and assertion of ourselves as strong characters in an incredibly broad narrative. Reluctant rebellions are the acts, great or small, which contribute to the reshaping of our cultural narratives. Baldwin explains:

Reluctant rebellion is a mode of thinking that questions boundaries and pushes back, kindly and firmly ... You can be a reluctant rebel at any age, rebelling against categories, your children's expectations, injustice—in any circumstance where rational anger against injustice is appropriate ... Reluctant rebellions point out sexist behaviour so no one can hide behind tradition and patriarchal assumptions .

Books like *Reluctant Rebellions* are necessary. They broaden our perspectives. They reinforce our convictions. They bolster our compassion. They give us the tools to assert ourselves in societies that are not, however much they may profess it, built on notions of equality. And, when we allow our voices to share their words, they help us to reframe our shared stories to guide us as times change.

Katie Stobbart is the editor of *Raspberry magazine*, a publication featuring coverage of art, culture, and community life in the Fraser Valley. She writes from Abbotsford. Her poetry and art has been published in Loudon Singletree and by the Poetry Institute of Canada.

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new prose by
Harold Rhenisch

The Art of Haying is the inaugural title in a new Icelandic-Canadian series from Ekstasis Editions. Containing prose meditations and almost 200 photographs, it is a beautiful and poetic view of our world.

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SHIFT BY KELLY SHEPHERD

Hannah Main – van der Kamp

The day a review copy of *Shift* came in my mailbox was the same day that Fort McMurray first came into the news. A casual glance opened to The Fort McMurray Trickster Switch:

...the coyote was back,
clay coloured and prairie shadow thin
with cautious steps
on the newly excavated ground.
I'm sure he didn't recognize the place
we had been busy making into
the surface of the moonle
I thought I felt him staring
but I couldn't look him in the eye.
We were held there for a moment,
orange hard-hat workers,
an invasive swarm of ants and trucks
and excavators as big as fossils
fuels turned back into dinosaurs.
So much noise and filth,
so much damage, the earth
herself sent someone to have a look.



Shift
Kelly Shepherd
Thisteldown
Press, 2016,
paper, 96 p

Kelly Shepherd is originally from Smithers and now teaches in Edmonton. His chapbooks have been appearing for several years with various small presses. With 12 hours shifts in NWT burning off excess diesel to cement work and landscaping and every kind of labour in between, he fits into the genre of Work Poet, an honourable calling for a writer in the Northwest. Think of Tim Bowling in commercial fishing. Though his notes reference Thoreau, Snyder, Leopold and Dillard, the poems also suggest appreciative reading of McKay and Lane. The jobs are all hard but not without lyrical and reflective noticing: a baby jack rabbit, a lone pelican, marmot fur, nuthatch

THE DAYS

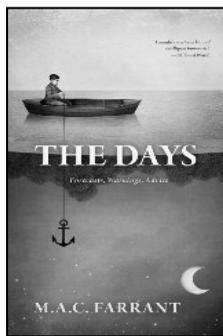
Julia Dovey

One cold fall afternoon, I made myself a cup of coffee, added a healthy shot of Baileys, and stood at my window. I gazed thoughtfully into the middle distance—which was, unfortunately, the turbine roof vent of a neighboring townhouse—and in that moment I felt meditative. Pensive. Worldly, even.

Then I sat down, opened a book, read that I “should never look for deep structure in a bowl of oatmeal”, and realised that I still had something to learn about life.

M.A.C. Farrant has published numerous works, including *The World Afloat: Miniatures*, a collection of short fiction pieces that won the City of Victoria Butler Book Prize in 2014. Her latest title is *The Days: Forecasts, Warnings & Advice*. Like an old, plastic margarine container in the possession of a packrat, it's full of strange, tiny items, each as different from the other as a battery is to a battered piece of strawberry candy.

Nimble walking the tightrope between prose and poetry—what a cover blurb describes as “unconventional, very short stories”—these knife-sharp narratives rarely exceed a page in length, with several jotted down in a mere sentence or two. One will be hard pressed to find a pattern; entries range from pieces of odd advice, to a scrap of life from a middle-aged housewife, to short “vibes” that take a few seconds to read and quite a few more to digest. It is difficult to find a story that doesn't give one a moment's pause, if only to give a brief chuckle or thoughtful “huh?” before moving on. Occasionally a story hits the hidden, less attractive side of life, the side that



The Days: Forecasts, Warnings, & Advice
M. A. C. Farrant
Talonbooks
2016, paper

feather. *Shift* is not primarily Nature poetry; there are accounts of injuries on the job, rough times remembered and tough stories overheard.

Many kinds of contemporary poets are needed for many kinds of readers. There's room for lots. There is no need to quibble over who's really got the Great Poet badge. Think of the commentary about Bob Dylan's Nobel prize. In the October issue of *Maclean's*, Jaime Weinman writes, “...the award to Dylan is really a way for the Nobel committee to rebel against the kind of literature it usually recognizes: small, personal and with a select audience. By picking a pop writer over writers in more prestigious forms, the voters might be indulging in a fondness for writing that reaches a large audience and with which a lot of people can identify.... the implied message may be that poetry should be more like Dylan.” Shepherd's pieces are mostly small and unpretentious. Uncomplicated and accessible, innovational they are not. That is not to say that his is not a fresh voice. Innovation with language is necessary; someone has to do that difficult groundbreaking work, witness Liz Howard, the recent Griffin prize winner. But no one form qualifies automatically as “elite”. It is the authentic workmanship within a style that determines what is elite. Shepherd is writing literally about “ground breaking”. Physical labour can be so numbing for many. Shepherd can do it and simultaneously notice the ephemerals and find the words for them.

Shift is an appropriate title for this volume. The arresting cover (design without acknowledgement!) of a cutaway bird showing both surface and skeleton is a shift. Then there is shift as in 12 hours. There's also the shift from the hours of labour with large machinery to the work of making the poem. Last but not least, many poems are about animals who shift from place to place, from earth to air to water.

Finishing this review, two other shaking events occurred. D. Trump became President-Elect of the USA and Leonard Cohen died. The first is the normalizing of the vulgar and banal. How could the public discourse have regressed into such coarseness? The latter is about the honesty required by poetry.

Time to shift the gears of popular culture; it won't hurt to reread Cohen. In 1978, Cohen wrote,

(continued on page 18)

hates a friend's baby, or quietly urges an old, vet-bill accumulating pet to get a move on. It might take a stab at you, it might not; either way, the moment ends, and it's on to the next “huh.”

Although the stories themselves do their best to stand on their own—and they do, quite effortlessly—there are threads that weave loosely throughout the text. Nostalgia settles upon the tales like a light blanket, often hinting at times past. The book itself is an odd, Alice and Wonderland-esque calendar, with entries that put significance into insignificant dates and seasons that pass with the turn of a couple of pages. You can feel as though you're growing older in the few hours it takes to read these tales. Or, perhaps, you simply become more aware of growing. No worries, it's a light book—it won't dent the wall if you chuck it. It might even take the ruined corner as a compliment.

M.A.C. Farrant has utilized a keen wit to create book that doesn't give the brain a moment's rest. It also isn't a book to be absorbed completely by a single reader; there are stories that will ring painfully true for some, yet land with a dull thud for others. A fair number are simply nonsense. Perhaps it was intentional; maybe they just weren't my stories. Since there isn't a clear line or moral, this is not a book that ends with thunderous applause, nor is there a strong sense of finality or accomplishment. Like some things in life, maybe it isn't meant to have one.

When I finished reading this book I looked at my coffee, now cold. Perhaps there was significance there; the steam no longer rising, the alcohol evaporating, the drink bittersweet and lifeless on a dusty table. Perhaps I just needed to visit the microwave.

Julia Dovey writes from Aldergrove, British Columbia. She is currently working towards publishing her first novel.



M.A.C. Farrant

"THE GREAT CLOD": AN INTERVIEW WITH GARY SNYDER AT SAKURA TIME

Trevor Carolan

Gary Snyder's new book *The Great Clod* (Counterpoint Press) offers some of his most luminous prose on a lifelong passion for the cultures of China and Japan. Borrowing its title from Chuang-tzu's subtle classic, and subtitled "Notes and Memoirs on Nature and History in East Asia", this felicitous, late-career volume presents Snyder's unique weave of dharma scholarship and ecological pensées that his readers have come to treasure. In it, he reminds us too of China's ancient Daoists and of their moral traditions that originated within a frame of reference shaped by nature and the human condition. Veteran Kyoto Journal contributor Trevor Carolan spoke by telephone with the beloved poet and elder of the global environmental movement from northern California's Sierra Nevadas.

* * *

Gary, the epigraph from Chuang-tzu about life and death suggests that, when it's time, you're comfortable with the idea of moving on from this present incarnation...

Yeah. It's not a big deal. That's not a big deal.

The epigraph reads,

"The Great Clod burdens me with form, labors me with life, eases me in old age, and rests me in death. So if I think well of my life, for the same reason I must think well of my death."

That's right. It is one of Chuang-tzu's big statements on "The Great Clod." There is another later on in the book that I quote too, about hiding yourself in the world. The whole of the Chuang-tzu text is a good sized book and the complete text has been translated by Burton Watson. It's one of the classics of Chinese literature. For one thing, it's very early, a remarkable piece of writing. Much more playful and much more vivid than Lao-tzu's *Dao De Jing*. Much longer.

It has a different flavour.

Well, it constitutes the continuation and the other side of Daoism, and for people to judge Daoism entirely by the *Dao De Jing* and not to know the Chuang-tzu text – there are a couple of other texts too – means that you really haven't done your study, you haven't done your home-work. The Chinese government official line is to ignore all of Daoism and to concentrate entirely on Neo-Confucianism.

That suits their administrative purposes surely.

Surely. But it also just happens to be what the whole society is tuned into anyway, really.

In your new book's introduction you note that as a boy you were "radicalized" by seeing the Pacific Northwest's heritage cedar stumps—their ghosts; that they spoke to you about what had been going on here. Is this when you began seeing "non-human beings were worthy of moral regard"?

I always felt that. I just felt it.

A lovely phrase you offer is how "the Mahayana drama" includes all the sentient beings— animals, plants—the lot. Can you pick up on that a little bit for us, the Mahayana drama?



The Great Clod:
Notes and Memoirs
on Nature and
History in East Asia
Gary Snyder
Counterpoint
2016, hardcover

The Mahayana literature and the Mahayana philosophy is on a huge scale. The cosmology of India is on a huge scale and is willing to look at numerous universes and galaxies and the possibility of all sorts of different beings that we have no idea of now. All you have to do is read the big Mahayana sutras, for example *The Lotus Sutra*, and see the scale that they propose to talk about the world and the cosmos in it. They have a cosmic view of the universe, not just a single, planetary view. So that underwrites the Mahayana tradition, so to speak; it lies behind the Mahayana tradition as it is found in China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Mongolia, Tibet, and so forth. They have this big-scale drama going on behind the scenes. The Zen people have said, 'Well, we don't need to talk like that. Let's just pretend to bring it down to the earth.' So, that's how you understand it.

In the essay "The Wolf-Hair Brush" you reflect on the fu/prose-poet, Sun Ch'o and what he says about the primal mystery of Ch'i – "When the Dao dissolves, it becomes rivers; when it coagulates, it becomes mountains." You also suggest that with too much human impact, it gets harder to observe the rise of ch'i...

That's an obvious observation. But that's a funny way of talking about the Dao because I actually understand the Dao better as process. The idea that it can 'become' mountains and 'become' rivers is a kind of cute way of talking about it.

I've always thought of Dao as noun and verb, an idea and a process.

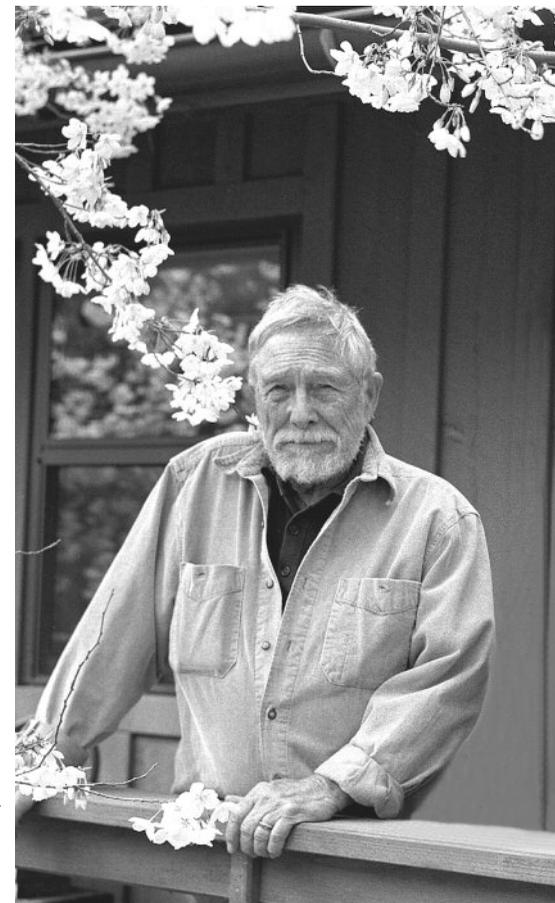
I think the key term there probably is process.

In discussing China's traditions of the brush and calligraphy, you comment that the term for civilization in China is wên ming—"understanding writing". In our time, writing skills among young people are in alarming decline. Do you think that with digital technology we may need a new understanding of the role of writing in communication?

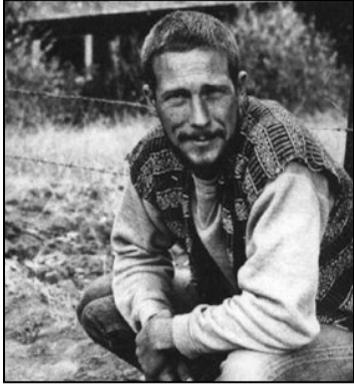
The word 'civilization' in Chinese and Japanese simply means literacy. Unfortunately, I don't really believe that's true. I mean, I don't believe that civilization is measured by literacy. I think you have very civilized cultures that were not 'literate', but that's a more sophisticated discussion and I don't get into that when I'm talking about China.

About the declining writing skills among young people, partly this seems to be the result of iPhone technology where they text each other using very few characters.

Well, I don't know how this is all going to shape up. It has a history of its own and it has several possible futures. The plus-side of what's been happening in the world lately with young people is a revival of orality—more reliance on extemporizing songs, extemporizing talks, drama. Drama is live orality. A play is not experienced until you see it on the stage. Reading the text of a play does not give you what the play is really



Gary Snyder (Photo: Kurt Lorenz)



Gary Snyder

doing. So that's the other side of things. There's a wonderful book on this topic by Professor Walter Ong called *Orality and Literacy* [Routledge] It's a paperback too, and it really goes into the details of what the pluses and minuses of both are. It's wonderful. Everybody has a kneejerk response to literacy— 'Oh, literacy is good. We need it.' But they don't understand what's lost when you lose orality.

Robert Bringhurst has much to say about that whole tradition as well.

Yeah, Bringhurst is really into that.

You've observed that the grinding of an ink-stick on stone is itself a form of meditation. Chuang-tzu and Confucius both talk about "the Fasting of the Mind"—making it unified, One. Can you suggest some contemporary parallels for this kind of fully-attentive practice?

Paying attention and being observant in the world and calming your mind is not necessarily of itself being spiritual or religious. It is just simply the practice of being alive. If you want to talk about calligraphy, my original teacher of calligraphy, Lloyd Reynolds, taught people how to trim a quill, how to make their own ink—what it was like to make ink and have a quill that was just right, and had to dip just right. That takes time and attention. It's just like Chinese calligraphy.

Two of your new essays especially stand out—"All He Sees is Blue, Basic Far East" and "China and Nature." These are very scholarly essays on natural geography. What inspired you to work with such carefully detailed research writing and scholarly tone?

Well, I'm a scholarly person and I do a lot of writing that is not creative writing but is scholarly writing. So, I just let a little of it peek out there. Also, I was already interested in all those things for the Western hemisphere. There are a few of us who get together from time to time and talk about the last 12,000 or 13,000 years and how the ice age gradually dissipated in various ways as we got to the current situation.

You write that after reading translations by Waley and Pound, and some classical East Asian religious-philosophical texts, you had a rosy idea that China and Japan had made peace with nature. How soon into your Asian sojourn did you see how things really were? That despite the beauty of their cultural ideas "large civilized societies inevitably have a harsh effect on the natural environment"?

It didn't take long. You can see that right away when you go to Japan. You can see it on the first day that you're there, or your first day in Taiwan, or your first day in mainland China. There is very little original vegetation. If you have the eye trained for it, you realize that none of [what you see] is original vegetation. That's all subsequent vegetation that has come in, in various ways and in various layers. And that's true of [Britain] too. You know where they have all these pine trees in Scotland? That's not the original vegetation of Scotland. The pine trees come in after it has been clear cut. That's true all over the world regarding the vegetation. If you know what you're looking at, you can tell what it was before. China is very hard though. It took a lot of research on my part and on everybody's part to figure out what the forest cover of the basin of the Yellow River in North China was 2,000 years ago. It's very hard to figure that out. You have to dig down into the soil and see what the layers are.

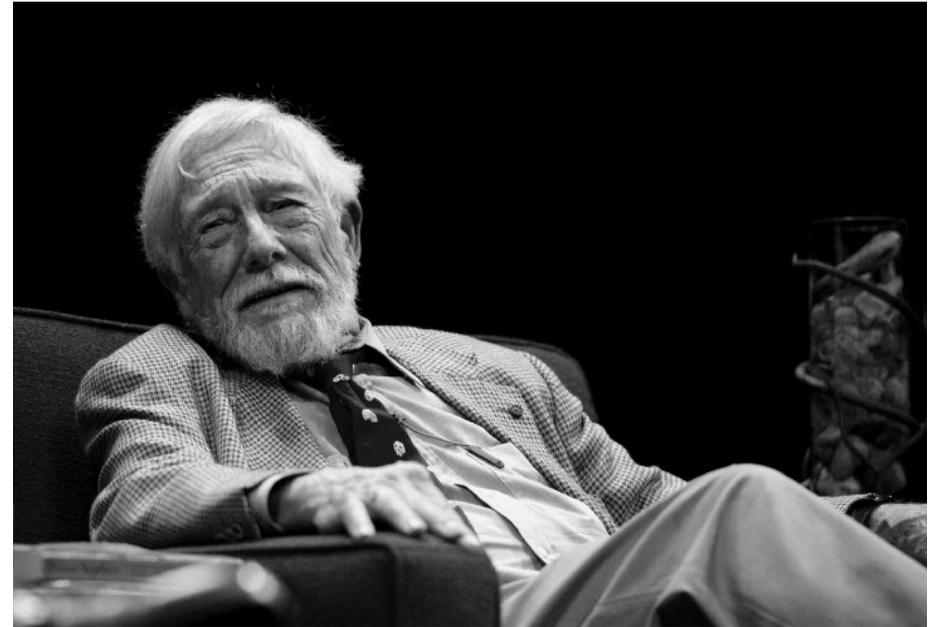
In the essay "Summer in Hokkaido" you mentioned that you were drawn to worship at natural shrines, at numinous places in Japan. Did this make you feel more at home?

Oh yeah, sure. I recommend it highly, the local shrine.

Ironically, even as you drew near the gods of earths and water, Japan was already devouring itself ecologically.

At the same time the Shinto shrines are flourishing right in the heart of Tokyo and they have Shinto ceremonies for the groundbreaking before putting up the big skyscraper. So, it's a pretty interesting culture.

Ken Rodgers, an old colleague from Kyoto, prompts this next question. He asks, 'In



the development of your personal frame of reference, how pivotal was your time spent in Kyoto in the 1950s and 60s?

It was immeasurable! You can't substitute short trips somewhere for actually living there for a number of years.

What in particular did Kyoto represent or reveal to you, would you say?

On which level? It's not just a city. It's a watershed. It's an environment. It's a habitat. It is not just occupied by you and me. It's occupied by insects, and birds, and mice and so that's what I mean by asking on what level. You want to know my sense of the whole landscape and the watershed, or do you want to know my sense about the human society?

Kyoto's human society.

Well, human society in Kyoto has really good manners and so I learned. One of the first things I learned in Kyoto was that my manners weren't very good. And so I tried to correct that gradually by paying attention to what other people did and how they did it. I also learned that my clothing really wasn't very good and that Americans are very sloppy and careless about their clothes, but the Japanese, the Chinese and the Koreans are not. I tried to learn how to put away my ideas about bourgeoisie and just sit in and be more parallel to the way the society as a whole went. I learned a whole lot about what to ask for and how to ask for it, how to say thank you and so forth. And I married a Japanese woman. I learned a whole lot from her and from her parents.

You mentioned earlier another excerpt in the new book from Chuang-tzu. It occurs in your title essay, "The Great Clod". Chuang-tzu says, "if you were to hide the world in the world...nothing would get away...[here's] the final reality of the constancy of things". It's a leading question, but is this constancy of things congruent with the impermanence of things?

That's part of it, impermanence. Impermanence moves at various speeds. You'll find many years of history behind something, and quite a bit of history ahead of it before it has completely changed into something else.

In The Great Clod you mention that civilization came to China roughly 1,500 years later than the Near East, and that as a result China would stay much longer in Neolithic village culture with its deeper grounding in organic processes and cycles of the natural Sphere. This makes its development of the concept of Dao more clear...

I think that might be true. That might be one of the ways to understand how it is that China developed. It wasn't as heavy and hierarchical as early as, say, the Mesopotamian basin or the basin of the Nile River were.

You add that, historically, during the Shang period [approx.1700-1000 BC] the warrior elite structures fostered their own religious rituals that were different from the old nature-based practices based on Gratitude and Trust. Rulers became alienated from the ruled, from nature. Politically, are we that different now?

No. What are the religions of the 21st century in the developed world? They have very little to do even when they are examining nature as in the various varieties of biology and chemistry and so forth. They are doing so in a very mechanical and materialistic way. It isn't too many people that are able to put themselves in the frame of mind that sees the world in all of its various complexities and life.



In "Wild in China," you note that during the Six Dynasties period [220–589 AD] it was not uncommon for officials to turn away from administrative life for reclusion at their rural homesteads, and you mention the poet Tao Yuan Ming being notable. We don't see much evidence nowadays of this honorable idea of consciously 'being a nobody in the world.' Do you have any thoughts of governance as a practice?

Chinese government officials and capitalist leaders, many of them, will still give out lip service to those values and will still hope to live that way after they retire from their life of power and money. They may return to doing calligraphy practice. Especially in Japan they may return to tea, making tea. They may return to playing some musical instrument or studying Noh drama. That's very much true in Japan and the same is true in its own way in large parts of China. It is considered very refined and very high class to simplify your life and return to the arts after you've had a successful career. And that's true even if you've been a highly placed person in the Communist Party, for some of them.

In "The Way", you write that "Daoists sought a base of value in the observable order of nature and its intuitable analogs in human nature—that this still crackles in the world today." How would you say we originally lose the Way? How did we lose the Dao?

The Chinese have more or less lost the Dao if you want to talk about it that way. Simple-minded ambitions and excessive material desires, etcetera, will do it every time. It's pretty straightforward.

In "Beyond Cathay" you write that Hui-neng, the Sixth Patriarch was probably part hill-tribe in origin. What's in that mix of Buddo-Daoist wisdom of his?

That's a long-time theory about him. Not everybody agrees, but there's a very strong theory that he was part minority person, a mountain person and maybe part-Chinese or maybe entirely a minority person like a Zhuang, or a Miao, Lisu, the tribal people that are still there today.

He seems to cut through intellection. Or comes at it from a different angle—the famous story of him and the mirror.

Maybe it's because he wasn't literate. He was illiterate. This is one of the same questions about 'what do we lose when we lose orality?' He had what we call a dharma eye, an eye for the dharma truth. Some people have it better than others.

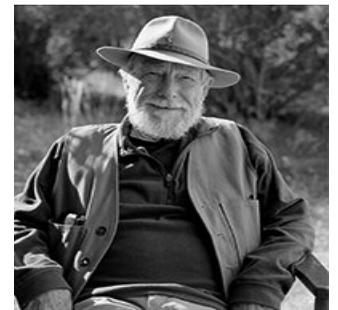
In "Walls Within Walls" you discuss China's genius for constructing walled cities and point to the beauty of Hangzhou for instance. There's also the Mencian/Confucian idea of establishing clear boundaries to avoid property disputes or conflicts. Geopolitically, these days China looks to be expanding its property markers in the South China Sea. Do you have any thoughts about that? Is there something we should be mindful of there?

Oh, that's just part of the chessboard. You make moves, governments makes moves, cultures make moves. You make a move and then you see if somebody responds to it and doesn't like it, or if they don't notice it. It's just part of the political game.

You note that increased social mobility among China's educated official class led to a disassociation with a sense of place and that during the Tang Dynasty this results in "a poetic obsession with impermanence as a sentimental response to the commonly perceived stress of Mahayana on transience and evanescence." Then you speculate that Sung poets were more dyed with the true spirit of Chan, of Zen, than those in the Tang Dynasty. Do you think some of us have idealized the Tang?

Maybe. We don't know. It's very difficult to know what was going on in those days but the flavor of Sung Chan is not quite the same as Tang Chan. And the truth is, of course, Zen or Chan is a very elite religion and is a very upper-class religion and that's true in modern Japan too. We're talking about just one part of what the religious life

is. Chan does not give us much insight into the religious life of minority people or working people.



You introduced many of us to Master Dōgen from Japan. In talking about Sung painting you remind us of Kuo Hsi, who says that "the mountains change appearance with every step." Is this akin to Dogen's "Blue Mountains constantly walking"?

Well, Dōgen was Japanese, but he went to China for several years. The Japanese elite of that time was thoroughly versed in Chinese literature, particularly poetry. So, it's not surprising, and Zen has always had a really close relationship with Chinese poetry.

Again, about the Sung: despite its artistic and literary glory you report that rapid population growth, declining natural resources lead to calamitous social despair to cheap labor, virtual wage slavery, reliance on coal, overworked soil. It sounds like the industrial England of Charles Dickens.

It wasn't quite that bad but it was getting bad. The Sung Dynasty begins to have a real rise in population. By the time you get another couple of hundred years down the Yuan and the Ming Dynasties we have modern China. Modern China is not the same as the Sung Dynasty. Modern China went through a Mongol dynasty and a Manchu dynasty in which the leadership of the whole culture was non-Chinese. The aesthetics changed.

Your poetry and essays have always cogently presented a long and deep view of human culture's engagement with the natural world. Can you extrapolate one consistent message from over the long term of your writing career?

Walking.

That was easy! A last question: As one of our beloved poets and environmental elders what advice would you pass on to young people these days?

Get a job. Yes, get a job because that helps. It helps you understand what you have to do in the world. It also teaches you that you will have to get along with society one way or another. You'll have to be able to be more flexible.

Is there anything that you'd like to say or add?

I just would like to say that *The Great Clod* is not the work of scholarship that I had thought I might be able to do. It's what I was left with after I realized that I had bitten off more than I could chew. But I am happy to be able to actually bring it out. I had thought that I'd never see it again, and if I live a little longer and am able to do it, I'm going to bring out a second volume which will be more about 20th and 21st century Japan. I've already written some of the papers that will be in it and several of them have already been published in *Kyoto Journal*.

Also, there's a new book on "Cold Mountain", Han Shan, a whole book out from the University of Washington Press [*On Cold Mountain: A Buddhist Reading of the Hanshan Poems*, 2015]. It's an essay about his poetry as poetry. It's by Professor Paul Rouzer. It's really good.

And you'll know that Jim Harrison passed away. The film we did together was *The Etiquette of Freedom*. I've been in touch with Will Hearst about that and we're going to write a kind of response to the media who tend to routinely characterize Jim Harrison as being a big womanizer and drinker and kind of a crazy writer. You want to read his writing. He is actually a Zen writer. That's how you can represent him best.

You can be sure I will. Many thanks for sparing us your time, Gary. Here's hoping all's going smoothly down your way.

It's okay. Everything's okay.

Deep Cove, British Columbia – Sierra Nevadas, California
Originally published online in *Kyoto Journal*

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

SNAKE CITY

Linda Rogers



Snake City
Joe Rosenblatt
Exile Editions
2015, paper

Even in the walled swamp, “paradise” from Farsi, predators lurk. Joe Rosenblatt, saved once by his parent’s narrow escape from the reptilian jaws of National Socialism, has perfected a repertoire of transformation, costume and camouflage. Disguised as an amphibian, the “I” in his poems, drawings and prose, he has been navigating the garden of good and evil and creating a unique voice in Canadian Literature.

Snake City is a prose ramble in familiar terrain, the sound walk and slough splash of a poet who has been over the same map again and again. This time he walks into a wet corridor of light, but like his Biblical predecessor, he “will fear no evil,” because his suitcase, full of magical distraction, blinks.

The poet keeps running away from home in search of the true goddess and this book is the map of his travels. Yessie (Yossl /Joe in Yiddish) leaves his earth mother behind in a fug of unambiguous insult.

“Her invective reverberated in Yessie’s ears, turning him into the emotional equivalent of a putrefying swamp otter swarmed by a cloud of obese flies in bombilation.”

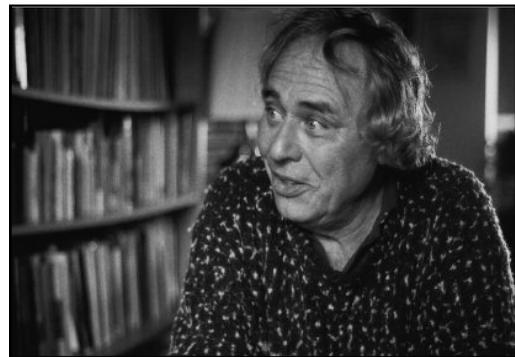
But bombilation is sweet music, percussive, steps to paradise and the rain that erases everything but rhythm. Human prints turn into *manus* and *pes*, amphibian prints, patter. In an instinctual behaviour known as *dermaphogy*, amphibians shed and eat their own skin. This is the unholy communion of toads, who leave no evidence.

The poet’s invisible locus is wandering song lines that become a web for the vulnerable. The toad laughs last as we fall into the seductive legato of music and baroque language, more distraction from the awful and awesome reality of sex and death in the micro cosmos where his febrile intelligence flares like flashlights and fireflies in the damp dark night.

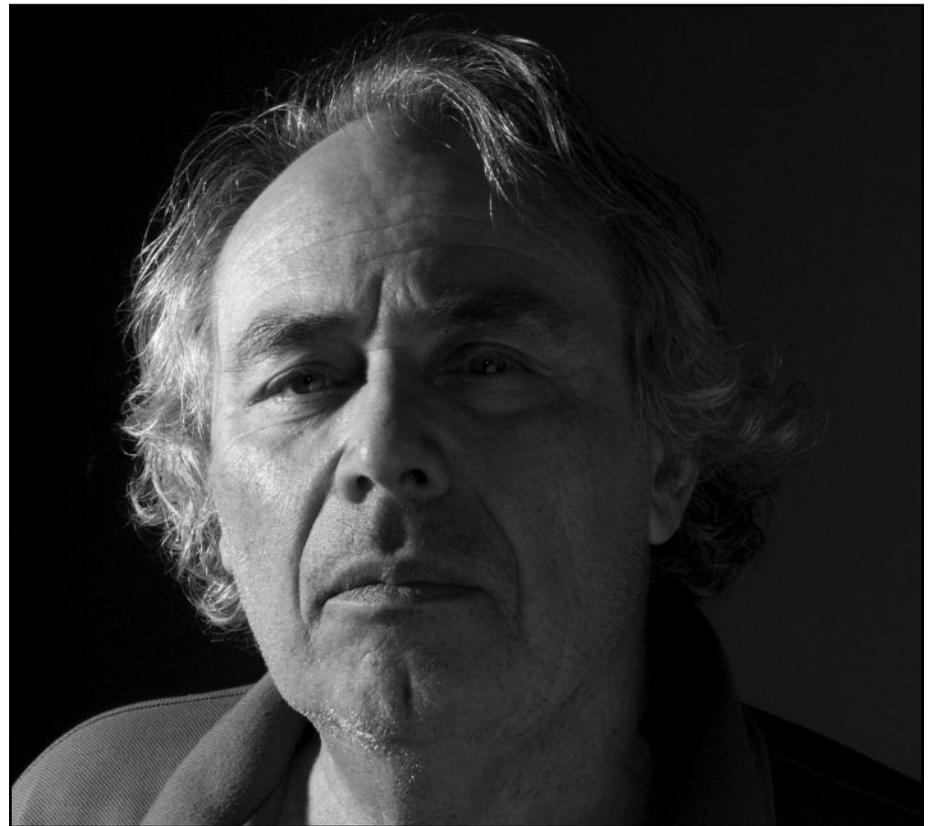
Snake City is a reprise of themes that began in Rosenblatt’s early Toronto walkabouts, peek-a-boos in boudoir windows, light and shadow in urban gardens and, in recent years, the Rainforest, where his oeuvre has been thriving in real exhalations of nature: wind in evergreen branches, water flowing in the Qualicum River, seabirds, the cats who stalk them, and humans walking into the great tableaux of birth, copulation and expiry. This music transposes easily to Gorgonia, his mythological swamp city.

His own stale date getting closer, the poet voices a nurse log, could be an alligator, lying in the muck, waiting for regeneration. Not an observant Jew, he nevertheless lives within the gestalt that defines orthodoxy, his ancestral rhythms. His reptiles speak in tongues and moaning Jezebels keep the garden hiping and hopping as he composes new liturgies for ancient rituals.

“Even if the crowd, in the main, were non-believers, and didn’t have a clue as to what Cottonmouth was actually vocalising, it making no linguistic sense, except possibly to some backwater sect, the multitude would still be enthralled.”



The wisdom of those who lead as opposed to those who follow is that what you say doesn’t matter as much as how you say it. The human brain has no real infrastructure for de-coding language. We improvise with words, but music speaks to a deeper resonance, which is non-verbal. Rosenblatt, the possessor of a powerful voice, has the cantor’s understanding of the synergy of musical gestalt and spiritual epiphany. His baroque syntax has the oratorical magnetism of the counter-reformist Savonarola, the mystic Baal Shem Tov and the evangelists and snake oil salesmen of the Old South. The medium is still the message, or the massage as the snake would say, promoting his own oil.



Joe Rosenblatt

As always, there is humour in the fallible behaviour that links creation and destruction as we reproduce to make our successors/usurpers, Long live the king! Sex is a pathetic joke, albeit pleasurable, and discovery of the little death that opens up the third eye is cosmic awareness.

The “phenomenal discovery: a barely detectable incandescence issued from what he discerned to be some ophthalmic seedling directly embedded in the centre of Yessie’s forehead.

“Had Yessie noticed he was in possession of a third eye, he may well have decided it was a sinful eye, generally transmitted by Satan to absorb the sight of relentless fornication.

“Yessie’s excessive Biblical ingurgitation would have immediately red-flagged Matthew 18:9...”

Could be this third eye, linked to the threesome in the poet’s feral dream, is the portal to enlightenment.

Rosenblatt’s linguistic excesses release laughter, which opens receptivity to the greater mysteries. It is the trickster language of Mozart, the haha that leads to the aha and ultimately the sublime. His compulsive creativity is the energy that keeps his images evolving, line-to-line, shape-to-shape, until it becomes the divine storm, the Judeo-Christian revelation: raw meat, apples and wafers floating in surreal visions.

The poet voyeur/voyageur, P.K. Page’s “Little Minotaur,” takes dictation from the Gorgonian swamp, a perfect milieu for morphing mythological creatures, but it could be his anywhere because *Snake City* is the place where body and spirit converge.

This is Rosenblatt’s hello Book of Genesis and his Goodbye Book of Revelations, the end and/or the beginning, erection and resurrection; cautionary tales falling like fruit from the tree of knowledge into the Everyswamp, which is eventually returned to its creature guardians.

And for us humans, it’s the slippery-walled rabbit hole. We are invited to enjoy the ride, which could end at the light or between the thighs of the wrong woman.

Linda Rogers, a fellow traveller of the snake and the toad, shares her crow’s eye view of Rosenblatt’s garden. Her own modest and discretely sexual story of the walled garden is related in *The Empress Trilogy* from Ekstasis Editions.

AMSTERDAM NOORD: A POST-APOCALYPTIC DAYTRIP

Alexandria Waycott



There's cold air in your face here as the train door slides open. Backpack in tow, I grip the rail at the edge of the door and try to avoid the gap on the step down. A bustle of voices and bodies contend for awareness as I search for an exit from the chaos of the train station. Then I follow the flow of human traffic. A group of men in matching jumpers stagger slowly into the crowd, stalling our movement with their small rolling suitcases that fit the overhead bins on cheap airlines. Heineken ferments the heaving breath of the man in front as I push my way through the jolly party group. Now I'm caught on the way through them and hear the squeak of inflatable plastic against my arm; I shift my gaze to find myself face-to-face with a blow-up sex doll—her expression is more shocked than my own. Welcome to Amsterdam.

It's still the city we know and love as Europe's destination of choice for stag parties and last weekend flings. You see them here, drifting in and out of hazy cafes and stumbling along the cobbles of the red-lit alleys in search of a kebab or a good time. An afternoon bike ride through Vondelpark or a stroll along a moody moonlit canal can still be tarnished by long queues or hordes of noisy tourists on segway scooters. But whether you're short on time or just passing through on a layover, you can save yourself the indigestion of too many cheese samples by skipping the city centre all together. Head north instead.

Amsterdam Noord, or simply "Noord" as the locals say, is the Northern district of the city. You can access it from behind Central Station by crossing the river IJ on a free ferry. It's only a seven-minute crossing, yet the stress of the city centre drifts away behind you as you approach the other side. An ominous black submarine sits in the river with green algae growing up the sides so bright it looks suspiciously radioactive. Abandoned factories juxtaposed with modern empty roads lay ahead in the distance.



It looks post-apocalyptic at first glance, but don't be fooled by the coldness of Noord's industrial nature—it's a new hub for art and culture. You won't find museums full of dusty, plundered artefacts, but the gallery space at Tolhuistuin in its most recent exhibition explores narratives of colonial legacies between South Africa and the Netherlands. This contemporary venue also hosts music and international literary events, such as the Read My World festival which featured writers from the Ukraine and Poland this year, and more specifically their reactions to Europe's changing political landscape.

Stacks of shipping containers adorned with colourful graffiti obstruct Noord's skyline. These are the containers you may have heard about that have been recycled into low-income and student accommodation in response to Amsterdam's ongoing housing crisis. If life in a shipping container seems frugally utilitarian, the fully-occupied homes have been fitted with all the necessary amenities. You can't but wonder what the response would be if this type of living arrangement was proposed as a solution for Vancouver's lack of affordable housing.



Head past the Greenpeace office where you'll discover IJ-Hallen, Europe's largest flea-market. It takes place every few weekends and is comprised of hundreds of stalls full of vintage and antique wares both outside and inside an abandoned shipping warehouse. Whether you're searching for a WWII gas mask or a biscuit tin with Stalin's rosy mug on it, you're in luck here.

I usually avoid the overpriced watering holes around Rembrandt Square and catch a local beer at Pilek, a bar constructed out of shipping containers with a private urban beach where you can enjoy a bonfire and some impressive views of the city from across the river. How funky is that? Just down the road you can relax over a bite to eat at the Noorderlicht Café—a greenhouse converted into a bar and grill. You can let the time slip by in the Noord: ferries run 24-7, year-round.



Despite the lack of windmills and wooden clogs, the Noord offers more curious travellers a genuinely alternative perspective of this historic Dutch city. I love the mural here of toothy-grinned Anne Frank that enshrouds the side of a concrete building with the words "let me be myself" emblazoned above her dark hair. It's an apt mantra for the undefined, unexpected district of Amsterdam Noord.

An M.A. candidate in European Studies at the University of Amsterdam. Alexandria Waycott lives and writes in the capital city's Prinseneiland district.

ON ARVIND KRISHNA MEHROTRA

Andrew Schelling

Arvind Krishna Mehrotra is a midnight's child. He was born in 1947 shortly before August 15th when the British withdrew from South Asia, leaving behind two fragile countries—India and Pakistan—headed for civil war. His mother had traveled to Lahore, Pakistan, for his birth. When her son was a few weeks old she returned to Dehradun, in the Himalayan foothills of India, where Mehrotra's father practiced dentistry.

Some of Mehrotra's finest poems return in memory to a historical, almost legendary Dehradun. The city was originally the *dehra-dun*, "the camp in the valley" for a 16th century expanding Sikh empire. It is today a city of considerable size. Dehradun enjoys or suffers about the highest annual rainfall in all of India, which makes it terrific for certain agricultural crops. Lychees and basmati rice formed the original economy. In Mehrotra's poems the lychees and other flora, as well as a wealth of birds, seem to be doing just fine. The buildings, roads, and other artifacts of human enterprise look bleached, withered, soggy, rickety, crumbled, or dilapidated. The sign for his father's dentist office is peeling and broken.

One reason to go to his poems is to hear some good modern words about lychees, as well as mangoes, pumpkins, papayas, fruit bats, jackfruit, the Rangoon creeper, civets, magpies, honeysuckle, parrots, hoopoes, and myrobalan trees. The biosphere seems dizzy with interesting species and subtropical crops. Counter to what Herodotus heard 2500 years ago on his travels though, "there are no gold-digging ants here." And—bad news for REI's worldwide search for raw goods to make into socks and long underwear—there are also no "trees that bear wool instead of fruit."

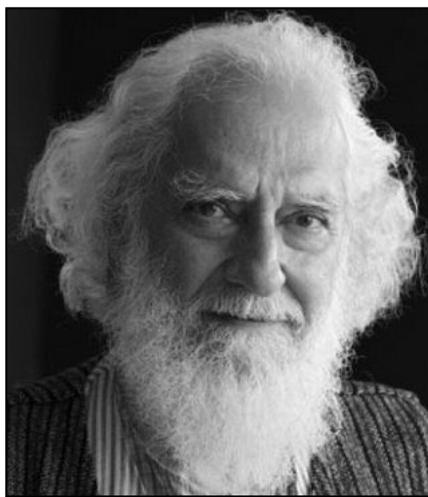
Yet for all this nothing in Mehrotra's poetry sounds alien to an American ear.

Mehrotra writes in English. It might be more accurate to say he writes a North American inflected Anglo-Indian dialect, one of the elegant and cosmopolitan possible tongues in current use. He never went to school at Oxford or Cambridge, those massive imperial centers that educated Tagore, Gandhi, Salmon Rushdie, and other Anglicized Indian writers. Instead, he went to North America, to Iowa State's Writers Workshop, where he met a troop of unconventional poets, among them another cosmopolite poet-translator, Anselm Hollo.

At the age of seventeen Mehrotra had set himself up for a poet's hard luck life, founding the small magazine *damn you / a magazine of the arts*. The title riffed off Ed Sander's New York 'zine full of contraband and piracy, *Fuck You*, which had appeared a couple of years earlier in 1962. This nod by a young Indian poet to an American Beat elder was telling. Mehrotra wanted to avoid the sort of English poetry that came out of Oxbridge. "How do you write about an uncle in a wheelchair in the language of skylarks and nightingales?" Though the Beats were early influences he set out on his own personal quest, for a language and a poetics durable enough to walk in for decades. He located surrealism, he writes, "as though I'd said to myself that since I cannot write about those things in English, let me do so in French."

Writing Indian poetry in international English—or in Marxist-Freudian dream French—gives Mehrotra a huge range, more expansive than the fields where most North American poets work. (Almost everyone in India speaks more than one language, often fluent in a surprising number; translation is the work of everyday life.) Like his friends Arun Kolatkar and Dilip Chitre, Mehrotra holds translation close to his poet's heart. A third of his *Collected Poems* consists of his renderings of other people. From the first century erotic anthology *Sattasai* of the Satavahana Dynasty, to fifteenth century razor-toothed bhakti poet Kabir, to nine twentieth-century Indian poets writing in regional tongues. Though he did not intend his book to do so, it encapsulates a short history of India's poetry. It never goes far from archaic, fragrant, flower-and-tree shamanic sexiness; or from a well-studied loathing of sham religion and contrived politics.

His Kabir poems provide a clue to Mehrotra's own mischievous play. "Born in Benares into a family of weavers," he writes sagely, summing up the old poet's character



Arvind Mehrotra

in one sentence—"Kabir chose to die not in the holy city of his birth but, in keeping with his contrarian views, in the miasmatic village of Maghar, about which the legend was that those who die there are reborn as asses."

In fact Mehrotra's translations of Kabir, the best-known Indian poet outside India, are the best you will find. His Kabir is colloquial, raunchy, a wise-ass, enviably clearheaded, and just plain wise. "I live in Fearlessburg, / Kabir the weaver says." He peppers his poems with humor and paradox, intending to disrupt rational thought, and usher his listener or reader into powerful, non-conventional states of mind. The term given to Kabir's outlandish ciphers and turned-over imagery is *ulatbamsi*, upside-down speech.

Another poem warns that you better quit fooling yourself, because soon "You'll be delivered to Deathsville." These townsites of Mehrotra's Kabir—Fearlessburg, Deathsville—seem to lie on a different train line than Robert Bly's Sufi-ized Kabir. Bly's can sound a bit loopy: too many tavern stops, a few over-rich metaphors. In fact with Mehrotra's pointed versions, Kabir suddenly emerges as what a few of us long suspected: one of that brave troop of dissident international poets, salted with honesty, which includes Blake, Akhmatova, Mirabai, and Rimbaud.

Mehrotra's own most recent poems, up through 2014, are understated miracles of minute observation. Hardly a whiff of his early surrealism remains. I think the world's own weird jamming together of conflicting realities might be enough. Partly it is because India sits on an edge between the archaic and the post-post-modern. Partly because the largest human presence in the poems is now Mehrotra's mother, an invalid with wandering mind, maybe demented, possibly alert to unseen intelligences.

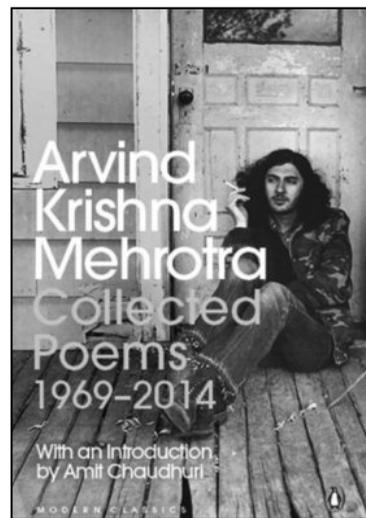
'Where's Mama? Where's Papa? Where are my sisters?'
'They're dead,' I tell her, matter of factly,
As though reporting an incident in the street.
'Is that so,' she says, her mind somewhere else.

These poems hold an intensely reserved emotion. They seem Objectivist in presenting the detail and holding back comment. Often I suspect the poet's mind is literally "somewhere else," but where? He looks piercingly at a broken bird egg on the ground, the toil of worker ants, or the mating games of the paradise flycatcher. Hidden ciphers in his words align with old billygoat Kabir's unsentimental concern for living critters. In Mehrotra's human realm these include an egg pedlar and an ear-cleaning man. The most recent poem in his book, or at least the final one of the new poems, finds paradox and a strangely "upside-down speech" buried inside a wild range of English, British, and Indian words.

*There's tawny in mulligatawny, a ling in lingerie...
A squirr in squirrel, a devi in devil.*

Kabir used to skim a narrow edge between reason and nonsense that I think goes far deeper into the psyche than surrealism. Like Zen koans his poems don't just avoid rational thought, but find ways to upend it and place the reader into rare and powerful states of mind. So do many of Mehrotra's poems. Crushing together "non-sense" with the idiotic cheers of monarchism, and the lingering horror of nationalism, he writes, "The goat is dead, long live the baa."

You could pack lines like that with your lunch and travel the planet.



Collected Poems with a Young Arvind Krishna Mehrotra on the cover

Andrew Schelling is an American poet and translator. An ecologist, naturalist, and explorer of wilderness areas, he has travelled in North America, Europe, India, and the Himalayas. Schelling lives in Boulder, Colorado. He teaches poetry, Sanskrit, and wilderness writing at Naropa University.

WHERE WORDS MEET PAINT

Hilary Turner

In *Reading Sveva*, Daphne Marlatt meets a kindred spirit in Sveva Caetani (1917-1994), a visual artist who, with originality equal to Marlatt's own, strove to dissolve the same binary concepts that have preoccupied the poet and novelist throughout her career. In *Recapitulations*, a series of fifty-six watercolour painting, Caetani created an autobiographical narrative, both personal and symbolic, in which history overlaps with myth, and identity with lineage; in which, moreover, she gently but categorically refuses the formal distinctions between foreground and background, centre and periphery, the real and the surreal.

Had Caetani not died at almost exactly the time when Marlatt was about to publish *Ghost Works*—her own wide-ranging study of home, place, self, family, past and present—the two artists would have had a great deal to say to one another. As it is, in *Reading Sveva*, Marlatt conjectures the conversations that might have been. She enters into dialogue with Caetani, not only directly, by quoting from her letters and diaries, but also structurally, by weaving poems in and around reproductions of six of Caetani's most intriguing paintings and a handful of photographs of the artist with her parents, Leone and Ofelia.

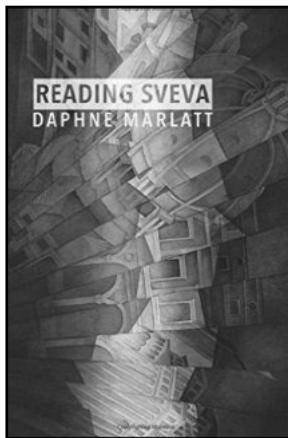
These parents are central to the narrative, and almost larger than life. The Caetani family (originally Gaetani) was one of the most ancient and prominent Roman lines of descent. In her readable and engaging MA thesis on Sveva Caetani (University of Victoria, 2000), art historian Karen Avery cites the date 750 BCE as the first verifiable record of this remarkable family. Primarily scholars, politicians, ecclesiasts, and diplomats, down the centuries the family collected honours, wealth, and distinctions galore. How odd, then, that the last eldest son in the paternal line, Sveva's father, having discarded his titles of duke and prince, should fetch up in Vernon, BC in 1921.

Leone Caetani was a distinguished scholar, and principal author of the ten-volume *Annals of Islam (1905-1926)*, a work that broke new ground by virtue of its use of documents in the Arabic languages. By all accounts, Leone was a towering figure (6 feet, 8 inches) and a towering intellect, with a command of eleven languages. His unhappy marriage to a woman of his own rank—a woman who had little patience with his scholarly pursuits—propelled him into a relationship with the beautiful and sophisticated Ofelia Fabiani. The birth of their daughter, Sveva was a turning point in many respects. Given that Leone had socialist leanings and was an admirer of British-style democracy, the rise of fascism in Italy round about 1920 made it desirable for him to emigrate. Equally intolerable, Italian law forbade him to pass on his name to an illegitimate offspring. Leone had been to Canada in 1891 on a trek on horseback through the Kootenays, and was impressed by the grandeur and openness of the landscape. His sudden acquisition of a home and orchard in the Okanagan thirty years later and his determination to begin life as a gentleman farmer were not entirely out of character.

Initially, the family maintained its European ties with regular trips to London, Paris, Rome, and the south of France. Sveva took art classes in Paris, and was tutored in Nice by the Russian painter André Petroff. Back in Canada, where outdoor activity was part of everyday life, governesses were hired from abroad for Sveva, and a steady stream of books arrived in the mail. Though undoubtedly a lonely childhood, it must also have been idyllic.

The stock market crash of 1929 took its toll upon the Caetani family fortune and, as Marlatt remarks in her Introduction to this volume, “the European trips and governesses came to an end.” Sveva was sent to Crofton House School in Vancouver. This opportunity to mingle with girls her own age was short-lived, however. In her second year at the school, a bout of measles sent her home. This illness was swiftly followed by a much graver medical condition: Sveva's father was diagnosed with throat cancer. His death in 1935 when Sveva was eighteen was a blow from which her mother Ofelia never recovered; she entered into a period of fearful seclusion that lasted until her death in 1960.

For Sveva, it represented the end of an independence that had barely begun, the end of all meaningful contact with the outside world, and (because Ofelia deemed it “a waste of time”) the end of her painting. She described this sacrifice as like “death in



Reading Sveva
Daphne Marlatt
Talonbooks 2016,
paper, 216 pages.

life”, yet for the next twenty-five years, she was a virtual recluse—her mother's caregiver, housekeeper, and protector—with only reading and her own thoughts to sustain her. Her father's intellectual legacy, a considerable bequest, can be summed up in a telegram he sent her from the Mayo clinic. It advises her to learn Dante's *Divine Comedy* by heart.

It is necessary to know these sad and difficult circumstances to understand the attraction that Caetani's life and work hold for Marlatt. There is, to begin with, the fascination of a young woman's sheer resourcefulness in maintaining a sense of self under such constraints. More importantly, in poems and journals, Sveva grapples with the big questions that concern all artists. As Marlatt notes, “she seems to have initially conceived her project as a poetic one. Her poems, like diary jottings, are constructed of statements and questions, sometimes rhetorical, often sincere.... Socially astute in critique, her poems record the thoughts of a passionate mind examining life experience within the larger spheres of Italian culture, Canadian contemporary life, and the multicultural traditions of the human spirit.” Sveva's unusual circumstances and family tragedies notwithstanding, in time Marlatt finds herself mainly interested in “the ontological question expressed in much of her writing: What is the role of human consciousness in the larger orders of the cosmos?”

The paintings both pose and answer this primal question. *Recapitulations* is, of course, the work of Sveva's later life, following the death of her mother. The paintings are unusually vivid: as Avery writes, “each painting glows as if it was painted in acrylic or oils rather than watercolour”. At times (in the magnificent *Workmanship*, for example) they depict divine and human “creation” as intertwined and mutually fructifying; at others (such as in *A Deep Transparency*) they suggest a human stance in liminal space, neither truly part of nature, nor wholly beyond it. The series is united by references to Dante's retelling of Virgil's cosmic journey, and punctuated by the personal symbolism of Sveva's life.

Given the complexity, the richness, and the completeness of Caetani's paintings and writings, it remains to define the relationship between Marlatt's poems and the “text” that inspired them. The poems are neither commentary, nor interpretation, nor do they evaluate or judge. Rather, they represent the summoning of one artist's intuitive knowledge of another artist's being. The task is not so much to discover “what it was like to be her” as it is to recapture the private voice in which she spoke to herself.

At their most powerful, Marlatt's poems conduct a kind of running interview with Sveva, addressing her as “you,” quoting her own writings back to her in a new context. For example, in “the hand promised” two speakers trade fragmentary images and phrases that replicate the effort of making a whole of seemingly shattered potential:



Daphne Marlatt

then what was handed to you?

*Flood-veined
the woman
Imprisoned storm*

*climbing walls
three bleeds the same
in Catholic purdah*

*walls become floors
scrubbed daily*

under constant erasure

*close-up: Sveva
daughter devoted
and friendless for
twenty-five years*

(continued on page 20)

DO NOT SAY WE HAVE NOTHING

Joseph Blake

Montreal-based Canadian writer Madeleine Thien is a masterful new voice on the Canadian literary scene. Like Michael Ondaatje, Rohinton Mistry and other writers who have brought world views and universal messages to embellish and emboss the Canadian mosaic, Thien's epic, familial narrative is a wise, nuanced, deeply spiritual gift.

Do Not Say We Have Nothing is a sprawling, fractured, music-inspired story. At its heart is Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, particularly Glenn Gould's brilliant recordings. The music's echoing movements of Bach's seemingly infinite lines of counterpoint are reflected in Thien's tale, a blood-pumping soundtrack to suffering and redemption.

The author is a subtle, smart writer who also uses another piece of music with multiple messages as her book's title. It's from the Chinese translation of Eugène Pottier's 19th century workers' song, L' International with its "we are nothing/let's be everything" lyric. The Chinese state turned that lyric inside-out with its translation/version of the song stating, "Do not say we have nothing/ We shall be masters of the World!"

Thien opens her intergenerational tale in contemporary Vancouver with Marie, also known as Jiang Li-Ling or simply "girl", the book's Chinese-Canadian narrator and her mother trying to decipher a letter that uses a form of state-sanctioned, simplified Chinese. The novel's characters, their lives stretching from Mao's revolutionary army's first battles to the modern diaspora in Canada, are brilliantly drawn and bring Chinese culture, history, and language to life with their depth.

Marie's mother is linguistically stranded in Canada, and language is central to Thien's nuanced tale. Jiang Kai, her husband, committed suicide in Hong Kong when Marie was a child, and it has seemingly sealed up his mysterious life. When Ai Ming, a teenage relative fleeing post-Tiananmen suppression turns-up in Vancouver, pieces of the narrative's puzzle begin to fall into place.

Ai Ming is Sparrow's daughter, one of the book's main characters, a composer and Jiang Kai's mentor who is also Zhuli's cousin, the book's third main character—a violinist and fellow student of Sparrow and Kai at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music



Do Not Say We Have Nothing
Madeleine Thien
Knopf, 2016
paper, 473 pp.



Madeleine Thien

before the Cultural Revolution and the Red Guard's "struggle sessions." The three musician/ friends' lives revolve around music, most importantly Western music. Overnight the music they write and perform, and in Thien's well-crafted portrayals literally breathe, is forbidden.

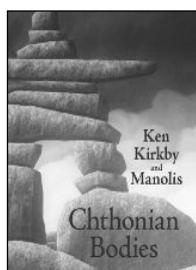
The book also focuses on three major events in a historical panorama stretching from Beijing in the north to rural Guangxi in the south. Thien's narrative describes the Cultural Revolution that grows like cancer out of the violence, mistrust and suppression of the Communist takeover, the days leading up to the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, and the aftermath of immigration to the

west and the isolated narrator's unraveling of the state-manipulated history through another component of Thien's tale, the collected stories in the mysterious Historical Records. In Thien's telling, it's a story that can't be remembered or forgotten.

In the course of this three-sided story, Thien offers intimate details of life in China that are often tragic and occasionally very funny. Thien creates a scope of history and humanity that is almost Shakespearean. Big Mother Knife, Sparrow's mother is so quirky that her gruff and abrasive humour you'll laugh out loud. She brings up Zhuli when Sparrow's aunt Swirl and her husband are sent to a labour camp. The Storyteller Wen the Dreamer is another well-drawn minor character. He brings the ghostly Historical Records slowly into focus. That book unfolds in a set of notebooks that have been copied and recopied, passed hand to hand throughout *Do Not Say We Have Nothing's* three-part historical span. Historical Records also references Sima Quian's classical book, Historical Records, perhaps China's most important work of history. Sima Quian was castrated by the emperor for writing this masterpiece, perhaps another message of caution and warning folded into Thien's multi-layered novel.

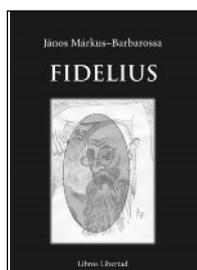
Thien's book is at its heart about her characters' unspoken intimacy, the masking of true selves, and their shared passion for music. It's about quiet defiance in the face of state-manipulated history, labour camp condemnation and shared, brutal horror. Most importantly, it's about resurrection and new beginnings. It's a riveting, glorious book that echoes the *Goldberg Variations's* transcendent, counterpoint beauty. It's a gem.

Joseph Blake is Music Editor for PRRB.



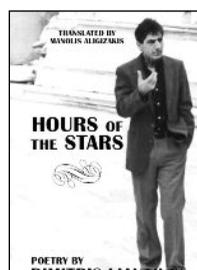
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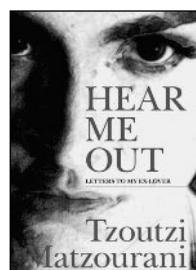
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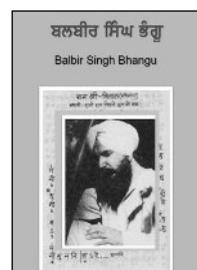
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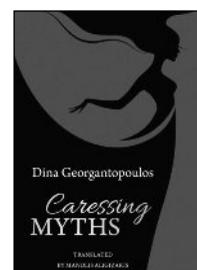
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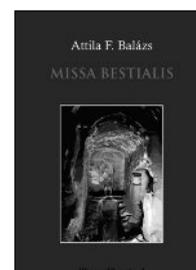
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THE CAPTIVE SYLPH

Richard Wirick

Ruth Franklin's masterful, deeply insightful biography lays bare Jackson's buried, tormented life, a mass of often toxic contradictions that make the 'The Lottery's' townspeople both understated and wholly explanatory. The Library of America has re-issued her stories under the sure hand of Joyce Carol Oates, but Jackson needed a Boswell for her odd New England peregrinations, and she has found it in Ruth Franklin.

Franklin has an uncanny ability to put the zoom lens on Jackson's use of place—both terrain and dwellings—as a metaphor for human arrogance and fear (two sides of the same coin). This, for example, from *The Haunting of Hill House*, illustrating as well her complete control of the rhythm and timbre of her sentences and paragraph structures:

[The house] reared its great head back against the sky without concession to humanity. No live organism can continue for long to exist under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to dream. Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within; it had stood so for eighty years and might stand for some eighty more. Within, walls continued upright, bricks met neatly, floors were firm, and doors were sensibly shut; silence lay steadily against the wood and stone of Hill House, and whatever walked there, walked alone.

The book posits Jackson as a major artist who arrived at the perfect time to write "the secret history of American women of her era," and most certainly women writers of that time. Her role as an artist more successful than and financially supporting her fellow writer-academic husband adds the toughest of ironies in the mid-Twentieth



Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life
Ruth Franklin
Liveright, 2016
hardcover, 656 pp.

Century sociology of letters. The better her books sold, the more jealous he became, a jealousy revenging itself in affairs, indifference, and anger at his marginalism and derivativeness.

Jackson wrote in distinct but (again, because of the time) interlocking genres. In her mass-market fiction for mainstream women's publications, the atmospherics were comic and never rose above keeping boisterous kids in the corral. But in her novels and stories, the mood could only be described as American Gothic, where the homemaker was trapped in a claustrophobic prison of maternity and dependency. Soon to follow was Wordsworth's twin cliffs of his own young contemporaries – "despondency and madness."

Jackson had escaped her mother in an early marriage to Stanley Edgar Hyman, a brilliant and contentious Jewish intellectual she met at Syracuse University. But Hyman turned out to be exploitive, bullying, controlling and selfish. He recognized her talent and encouraged her writing – as well he should, since her income kept them going for years – but he also kept her insecure and subordinate by flaunting his affairs with thinner women, pressuring her to write commercially geared stories, saddling her with the sole care of the house and the children (he helpfully bought her a dishwasher to increase her productivity). Jackson accepted his infidelities and his sense of entitlement, and blamed herself for being fat and lazy.

When he got a job as a professor at Bennington, she became a supportive faculty wife and a tireless, inspired hostess for his friends and colleagues. But she felt like an outsider and freak in the small Vermont village where they bought an enormous, ramshackle old house. The



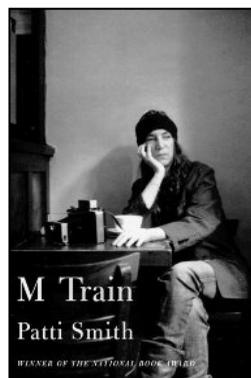
Shirley Jackson

(continued on page 17)

← Music →

M TRAIN

Joseph Blake



M Train
Patti Smith
Vintage Canada/
Penquin, 2015
paper, 277 pp.

I was lucky enough to catch Patti Smith's *Camera Solo* show at the Art Gallery of Ontario back in 2013. Many of Smith's black and white Polaroids from the show are republished in her new book, *M Train*. They give her meandering, elegiac writing a strange, dream-like focus.

The shadowy, atmospheric Polaroids seemed strangely talismanic on the walls of the AGO, but married to Smith's bone-dry text in *M Train* their power produces a synchronistic punch. "I'm going to remember everything," Smith writes like a true Kerouacian, "and then I'm going to write it all down. An aria to a coat. A requiem for a cafe."

And that's what Smith accomplishes with *M Train*. Like William Carlos Williams' red wagon in the rain, her subjects are plain and simple—her cats, the morning coffee, television detective shows, all connected to her haunted memories. Where Smith's award-winning book *Just Kids* was about her wild, youthful friendship with photographer Robert Mapplethorpe in 1970s New York before she became punk rock royalty and Mapplethorpe gained fame for his photographs, *M Train* is middle-aged Patti scribbling in her notebooks over copious cups of black coffee, brown toast with olive oil about her seemingly simple life, but mostly about her memories and her losses.

The book's powerful cover photo captures Smith huddled over coffee at her favourite table in her neighborhood Greenwich Village cafe, cheek on palm, watch cap pulled low above her dreamy, dark eyes. It's a haunting image for a haunted book. Throughout *M Train*, Smith carves out dreams, memories and reflections of an artist's

mind and plots her peripatetic travels to gather ghostly souvenirs of the past. Her photos bookmark these interior pursuits and worldly adventures. The book charts many pilgrimages—to Frida Kahlo's house in Mexico City, to the prison in French Guiana where Jean Genet was locked up, and to his grave in France where Smith brought a stone from the prison. There are visits to the graves of Rimbaud, Sylvia Plath and Bertolt Brecht, as well as journeys to Iceland where she hangs out with chess master Bobby Fischer, to Berlin and the obscure, cult-like Continental Drift Club, and to Japan and the graves of film director Akira Kurosawa and writers Osamu Dazai and Yuko Mishima.

And there are photos of Frida Kahlo's crutches, bed and dress, of Sylvia Plath's grave, of Herman Hesse's typewriter, of Virginia Wolfe's walking stick, of Paul Bowles in Tangier, and several of her husband—punk rock avatar Fred "Sonic" Smith. Patti met Fred in 1976 and pulled the plug on her career in punk rock to live with him and raise their kids in Detroit until he died of a heart attack in 1994. He was 45. *M Train* is haunted by his memory and other grief like the loss of her brother weeks after Fred's sudden death and the death of her mother when Smith was 11.

Remembering Fred, Patti writes "looking back, long after his death, our way of living seems like a miracle, one that could only be achieved by the silent synchronization of the jewels and gears of a common mind."

In another section of this honest, sad book she writes, "I want to hear my mother's voice. I want to see my children as children. Hands small, feet swift. Everything changes.

(continued on page 17)



Patti Smith

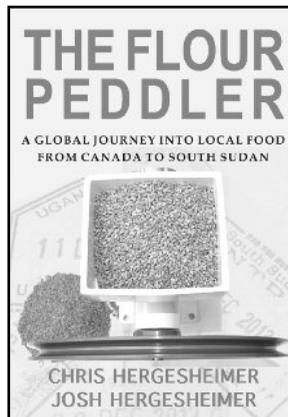
A GLOBAL JOURNEY INTO LOCAL FOOD

Rose Morrison

In *The Flour Peddler* brothers Chris and Josh Hergesheimer tell the story of Chris's commitment to both locally-grown and small-batch milled grains for human consumption, and the importance of community relationships forged through selling the resulting flour at coastal British Columbia farmers' markets and through a community-supported processor (CSP) group. Chris uses his bicycle pedal-driven grain mill not only to grind grain but also to interest people and educate them about Southwest British Columbian grain supply chains. *The Flour Peddler* is also the story of an international adventure.

When the brothers finally agree to close the unprofitable Flour Peddler locally-ground flour business, they are able to respond to the request of William, a friend who came to Canada from what is the now South Sudan. Using Josh's organizational skills, they bring a modified, pedal-driven grain mill to a women's co-operative in South Sudan, where home and community grain milling is slow and arduous.

Chris Hergesheimer is a researcher at the University of British Columbia and both he and Josh teach at the Boucher Institute of Naturopathic Medicine. The strength and success of their book which was shortlisted for the 2016 George Ryga Award for Social Awareness in Literature, lie in its topicality, adventurous story and enthusiastic protagonists. While *The Flour Peddler* is an easy, interesting read, the book's three-part structure is choppy. It jumps from the difficulties and complexities of travel in South



The Flour Peddler
Chris Hergesheimer,
Josh Hergesheimer
Caitlin Press, 2015,
paper, 256 p.

Sudan to an overview, in part two, of the history of grain production, disguised as a detailed account of an educational presentation to Canadian elementary school children. A lengthy section called 'The Bike Mill' follows before the scene shifts to one of the most interesting parts of the book; at the Juba Technical School in South Sudan students and instructors get together to assemble the grain mill and a sturdy frame, in readiness for delivery to William's village. This closes with a thrilling ride north in a Russian helicopter which brings the brothers nearer to William's village.



Part three returns the reader to Chris's home on British Columbia's Sunshine Coast where a marauding bear wrecks his grain shed. There follows an account of his many hours spent preparing for weekly farmers' markets and his reflections of what he has gained in experience and relationships through the Flour Peddler business, as well as his reluctance to give it up. This section also tells of the brothers' interesting South Sudan fund-raising campaign, which includes CSP sales of Chris's flour and a personal donation from an investment banker who, earlier, could not endorse the brothers' Flour Peddler business plan as financially sound. Such accounts demonstrate the brothers' tenacity and validate the worthiness of their project and their commitment to friend William.

The story's high point is 'The Workshop' in Panlang, South Sudan, where Chris and Josh demonstrate the pedal-driven grain mill to a women's group, then leave it with them, 'transitioning back to what it had always been about: grinding on a human scale'. It is reassuring to learn that William has started off-season crop trials in the village and that he will be still be there to provide some continuity. Political struggles

Continued on page 40

GARAGE CRITICISM

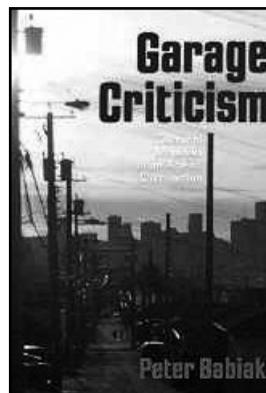
Bradley Peters

Peter Babiak moved to Vancouver from Ontario in 1994 and teaches at college there. *Garage Criticism* is his first book. Laced with wry, biting insight, this collection of essays is a rout of contemporary mores and a defiance of superficial culture, a book that questions the real cause and purpose of many North American frills and follies.

No topic is taboo. Nonchalantly riffing on the locals and lovers and landscapes that surround him, the result is a confluence of savvy, surprisingly funny critiques. He dismantles best-selling books and oversensitive students, analyzes the rebound of feminism, points out the hypocrisy of fighting terrorism with terror, discusses marriage and the merits of infidelity, Vancouver's thriving poetry, the sadism of happiness and more. He even takes a dig at Nabokov, that "literary genius but pretentious dick."

In "Julia's nipples and God's Barometer," Babiak laments the creative shrivel of lusty literature while the cult fanaticism of *Fifty Shades of Grey* merits pop notoriety. In "The View from Zero Avenue" he chastises America's "unsophisticated arrogance" and sacrosanct free-market economics, which seems prescient given the recent U.S. election.

Babiak's wit is relentless. While discussing the growing student apathy for language in "F you, Professor: Tumblr, Triggers and the Allergies of Reading," readers are presented with a convoluted, misspelled sentence (think pre-teen texting) from one of his first year literature students. "My soul goes through paroxysms when I look at this word carnage," he writes. "But mostly my head just really hurts because at root I'm a



Garage Criticisms
Peter Babiak
Anvil Press, 2016,
paper, 224 p.

good person."

Readers will note impressionist reflections from other writers who've influenced him—Nietzsche, Baudelaire, and Kerouac's laid-back jive. But it is the confluence of Babiak's own character and charisma, subtly tugging like a river current beneath swift sentences and sharp perspectives, that gives the writing its attitude and the book its unexpected hook.

The colloquial tone of *Garage Criticism* renders high-brow ideas in curt terms, offers a symbolic middle finger to pedants, and elevates mundane workaday moments into thought-provoking "melon scratchers" such as "A poem is like cleavage barely glimpsed beneath taffeta." He can describe an interaction in his office with a student as "so unnervingly wanton and such a bamboozling conundrum that it left me metaphysically overwhelmed." This play with language, though usually entertaining, sometimes feels like blowing smoke, but Babiak, a father who has learned to keep his own pretentious harangues in check, doesn't hesitate to knock the legs out from beneath his own armchair. He lampoons his own flamboyant use of language in "Purloined Gigabytes and the Secret Capable of Taking Place between Us." While expressing his desire for "reanimating my years with the sensuality that had drained from them," he observes "only a voluptuous yearning...the kind that leads to the sublime disorientation of landing in a stranger's bed, could give life the semblance of art...I still wonder if that's just an absurdly pretentious way of saying I wanted to get laid."

In its later chapters, the book has moments too where it dissects quandaries, such as the significance of untold secrets or the painful knowing of friendship as finite, and it offers unique angles of understanding that endow the book with significance. Discussing the existential incongruity of happiness in "Waiting for the Catastrophe of My Life to Be Beautiful," he writes "Happiness, if it exists as something more or less tangible, must be in the sub-microscopic moments when we give our attention to a soul

Continued on page 31

ASIA'S CONTEMPORARY ENGAGED BUDDHISM

Maryse Cardin

I began to meditate and study Buddhism as a last recourse when what I'd been striving to achieve in my life failed to bring me inner peace. I was ready to try something radically new: to sit on a cushion, and look at what was inside me. With the guidance of my teacher, I sat in stillness with my own inner situation. I also studied Buddhist ethics to guide my actions, and to live more skillfully with life's happenings. With time, I grew to wonder how I could be of service to others. It was a ripple that reached out from the centre of my own practice.

That's the experience I had reading *Seeds of Peace*: stillness and the observation that a committed practice of Buddhism by some individuals can evolve into a global social action movement. I describe reading this journal as stillness because it is a deep slow read. You are invited to contemplate. The quick fixes and entertainment focus of the mainstream media are notably absent.

Seeds of Peace is the quarterly journal of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) – an organization with Buddhist and non-Buddhist members in 20 countries. INEB was founded by Sulak Sivaraksa, a distinguished Thai Buddhist and human rights activist, and other luminaries including the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh. What this global community aims for is the creation of a more ethical, moral and peaceful world through social action.

Sivaraksa is the author of several pieces in the issue I reviewed. In "What It Means to Be a Buddhist in a Nutshell", he writes: "A point that cannot be over-emphasized is that suffering is not only personal but also social and environmental. In fact, personal, social and environmental sufferings are interconnected in the web of life. It may be readily apparent but capitalism and consumerism are the leading causes of suffering in the present world. We must learn to see systemic or structural violence. When we can see through all these, a possibility to end suffering with wisdom may emerge."

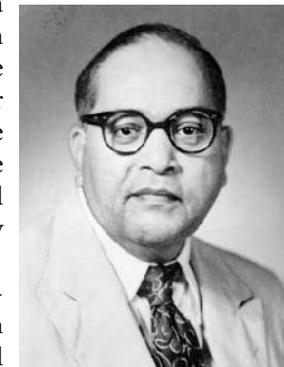
The journal combines news and opinions ranging from finding inter-religious peace, and global warming to social justice, and alternatives to mainstream economics, politics and education. There were also book reviews, remembrances and obituaries.



Seeds of Peace
Bangkok: INEB
Vol. 32, No. 3
Fall, 2016

Seeds of Peace brought my awareness to topics that receive little attention in our part of the world. For instance, an open letter to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh called for the protection of indigenous, Buddhist and other communities from violence in his country.

Several articles featured the 60th anniversary of Dr. Babasajeb Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism in India. Dr Ambedkar rose from humble origins as a so-called untouchable to become a scholar, a lawyer and a human rights advocate who wrote the Indian constitution. When he converted to Buddhism, he liberated himself from the caste system of Hinduism, along with 500,000 other untouchables who converted with him. From one of the articles: "More and more people throughout the world are grateful for the example he gave of non-violent social change despite coming from one of the most structurally oppressed communities the world has known."



Dr. Babasajeb Ambedkar

In the piece "Education that is Able to Eradicate Self-Centeredness", the author writes: "Today, our education system is inappropriate, a conventional kind of vocational training, where the ethics part is minimal and conventional. Education teaches cleverness for its own sake rather than with a sense of vocational purpose and an appropriate way of acting."

Throughout the publication, notices tell of conferences and educational programs Asia-wide—Bhutan, Sri Lanka, India, Myanmar—with names like "Ethics and Ecology" or "Peaceful Relations and the Transformation of the World." While some of gatherings are for a day or two, one of them called for a deeper commitment of six months. For a few moments I imagined myself there, going deep into meditation and study at the "Buddhist Leadership Training Program" in Thailand. Would I too become a wise and compassionate activist for social change like the peace-makers of INEB?

Buddhism rests in bringing awareness to our own inner life. *Seeds of Peace* is a journal that like intentional meditation practice contributes to a more peaceful world.

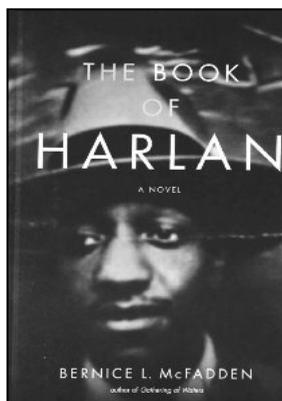
A Zen Buddhist practitioner at North Shore Zendo and former editor of *Japan EcoTimes*, Maryse Cardin is co-author of the textbook *Canadian PR for the Real World*. She writes from West Vancouver.

THE BOOK OF HARLAN

Joseph Blake

If you've read Victoria author Esi Edugyan's *Half Blood Blues*, the storyline to Bernice L. McFadden's tenth novel, *The Book of Harlan* is going to seem very familiar. McFadden set out to tell the story of the Nazi's Holocaust cruelty brought down on Black civilians in occupied France, and she does that and more.

Like *Half Blood Blues*, the main character in McFadden's recently published tale is a Black American bluesman. Harlan Elliott, like the characters in Edugyan's award-winning book, gets caught in the Nazi's European take-over. He and his bosom buddy Lizard Robbins are thrown into Buchenwald prison while enjoying a musical hiatus in Montmartre, in the 1930s the then Harlem of Paris. The atrocities that the Bitch of Buchenwald rains down on the concentration camp prisoners are vividly painted. McFadden is a skillful, powerful writer. She's equally strong in portraying Black life in America's segregated south at Harlan's birth in 1917. She captures the fabric of his family history and the post-slavery world his parents escaped to join the great Black migration to the north's urban centres. She's not a showy writer. She crafts her passages with the minimalist magic of a Miles Davis



The Book of Harlan
Bernice L. McFadden
Akashic Books. 2016
paper, 342 pp



Bernice L. McFadden

trumpet solo.

Harlan's mother is a piano teacher, and her friend Lucille a one-time touring musician hosts Harlem rent parties visited by stars like Louis Armstrong and Alberta Hunter. Harlan gets a big city buzz from Harlem's thriving cultural life. He takes up guitar and falls in love with the blues and the big city's music scene. As a teenager besotted by the blues, booze, babes and pot, Harlan becomes a professional musician, faces hatred and racism while touring with the band down south, and despite his talent is booted out of the band for his youthful arrogance.

After this fall from grace, Harlan teams up with talented, young trumpeter Lizard Robbins and the pair travel to Paris to perform. They experience life without racism until the Nazi take-over. In prison, Harlan and Lizard face bigotry, intolerance and sadistic treatment transformed in McFadden's able prose into a deep blues wail. Like the best blues tunes, this horror of degradation is capped with an epiphanous climax brought about by the restorative power of Harlan's music. A true blues beauty of a novel.

Joseph Blake is Music Editor for PRRB.

A GLORIOUS THOUGHT EXCURSION

Steve Potter

John Olson's thoughtful and often humorous new novel, *In Advance of the Broken Justy*, opens with a somewhat Kafkaesque quest to find medical attention for the narrator's wife's infected eye late at night in Paris during a doctor's strike and ends on January 8th, 2015 with news of the previous day's terrorist attack on the Charlie Hebdo offices playing on the television in their hotel room as they prepare to leave for home.

In the pages between the personal crisis and the international one, we are introduced to the oddball mix of neighbors in the narrator's thin-walled building who are driving him and his wife, Ronnie, crazy with noise from construction projects, stomping feet, and rather explicitly audible sounds of digestive functions from a neighboring bathroom. Noisy neighbors are enough to drive any introverted, bookish homebody nuts, but our unnamed protagonist tells us, during a seemingly obsessive and often hilariously aggrieved section of narration reminiscent of Thomas Bernhard, that he additionally suffers from hyperacusia — a heightened sensitivity to noise, and tinnitus — ringing in the ears, as well as Generalized Anxiety Disorder for which he has been prescribed a variety of antidepressants through the years.

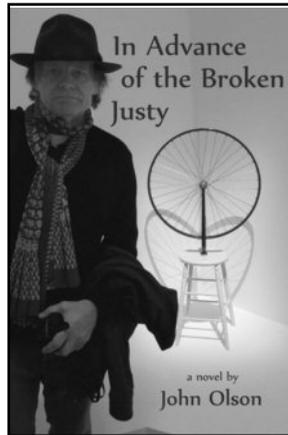
It's not only their immediate living situation that is cause for aggravation, the couple are also dealing more generally with a growing dissatisfaction with life in rapidly-changing Seattle. Olson writes that his dislike of Seattle, "evolved over a period of time, like an allergy that starts out with a minor rash and then grows into strange secretions and the constant application of topical ointments." As their disaffection with Seattle grows, so does their love of Paris. "...we each felt an attachment that had become deeply emotional, like a drug. We had become addicted to this city. It inhabited us, as Ronnie put it."

The love of Paris among certain artistically-inclined Americans has a longstanding literary and cinematic history, of course. Mr. Olson's novel continues a lineage tracing back at least as far as Ernest Hemingway's *A Movable Feast* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Babylon Revisited" through Richard Yates's *Revolutionary Road* to Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*. Unlike Gil Pender, the protagonist of Mr. Allen's film, who is mostly enthralled with fantasies of Cole Porter, Hemingway, the Fitzgeralds, Gertrude Stein and other American ex-pats in Paris during the Jazz Age, Olson's two protagonists are most interested in actual French poets, writers and artists such as; Rimbaud, Georges Perec, Michel Tournier, Gaston Bachelard, Raymond Queneau and Pierre Michon. And while their yearning for Paris is similar to that of the couple at the center of *Revolutionary Road*, it is a rather more grown-up and grounded love of the City of Lights. Olson's protagonists are a pair of older, working-class poets not young, upper-middle-class, suburban dilettantes like Yates's Frank and April Wheeler.

In addition to their dissatisfaction with home and city, the couple are also dealing with the loss of their beloved car, the broken Subaru Justy of the novel's title. After attempting to adapt to a car-less life, including several comic misadventures with public transit and Car2Go, the narrator takes some money out of savings to buy another used Subaru but somewhat spontaneously decides he'd rather take a trip to Paris than own a car again. Ronnie agrees. Plans are made, tickets are purchased, and their ongoing study of French is kicked into a higher gear. Away they go.

The narrator alludes to dark and outrageous moments in his past, back when he was still drinking and taking drugs. "At the age of eighteen, I left my father's house and struck out for California, following the scent of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll. I was into Dylan and the Rolling Stones. I liked the Beatles, but they remained a bit too wholesome for my rebel-without-a-cause setup. And after reading Aldous Huxley's seminal essay, *The Doors of Perception*, I had a raging desire to experiment with psychedelic drugs."

He tells briefly of getting beaten up at a New Years Eve party in Burien, attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and three failed marriages. One suspects Olson could write some fine fiction of wild times, drunkenness, heartache and despair in a Kerouacian or Carveresque vein if he felt the urge to mine his past, but part of what I love about this novel is that it doesn't do that. The image of the artist as a young wild man is a popular one and there have certainly been more than enough misbehaving poets, musicians, painters, novelists and so forth to give that cliché some weight, but



In Advance of the Broken Justy
John Olson
Quale Press, 2016,
paper, 335 p.



John Olson

what makes an artist an artist is serious, longstanding dedication to one's art. It's refreshing to read a novel that dispenses with the youthful misbehavior in a few short sentences and instead depicts the couple at its center as actual grown-up artists.

In Advance of the Broken Justy is not a novel which glorifies the wild kicks of youth or wallows in the despair of drunkenness and divorce, but rather one which celebrates more mature, quiet kicks like the contemplation of works of art in the Musée d'Orsay, the Louvre, and the Georges Pompidou Centre. It is a celebration of bookstores not barrooms. The narrator and Ronnie go on a sort of literary safari, with guidance provided by a list of the best bookstores in Paris received via email from the French poet Claude Royet-Journoud, and enjoy a cafe visit with the poet and translator Michel Deguy.

"One of the main reasons I wanted to go to Paris was so I could stand in a real bookstore once again before I die," Olson writes. "The bookstores in the United States have deteriorated into something little better than a gift shop, or those book and magazine shops you sometimes see at the airport. Trashy titles. Nothing of any real interest." He's not grown so jaded that he's lost all perspective, however, and can still see quality on those rare occasions it may be found. He goes on later in that passage to praise Elliott Bay Books and Open Books and elsewhere declares Magus Books in the University District to be one of the best, if not *the* best, used bookstores he's ever been to.

While at certain points it's clear that the author's imagination is at play, much of *In Advance of the Broken Justy* reads close to straight autobiography. That, of course, does not necessarily mean that it is, but the pleasures of reading the novel, for me, were often more akin to those of nonfiction. David Shields, among others, would argue that the distinction between fiction and nonfiction is meaningless. While there is some validity to that stance in that in either case the author is working with a blend of memory and imagination, I think it is a bit of an overstatement. Phillip Lopate writes in a section of *To Show and To Tell: The Craft of Literary Nonfiction* in which he compares and contrasts the tendencies of nonfiction versus those of fiction that, "What makes me want to keep reading a nonfiction text is the encounter with a surprising, well-stocked mind as it takes on the challenge of the next sentence, paragraph, and thematic problem it has set for itself.... None of these examples read like short stories or screenplays; they read like what they are: glorious thought excursions."

It is Olson's surprising, well-stocked mind which is of the greatest interest here, the consciousness which regards what happens more so than the particulars of what happens, that takes interesting digressions into considerations of the work of Bob Dylan, Marcel Duchamp, Georges Braque, and organic chemist August Kekulé among others. Of the other books I've read recently, it is Patti Smith's second memoir, *M Train*, I find it most similar to in both tone and content. Smith, the poet-rocker legend, and Olson, the poet's poet who can count luminaries such as Michael McClure, Clayton Eshleman and the late, great Philip Lamantia among his fans, are exact contemporaries, Ms. Smith being the elder by only a matter of months. Their influences overlap to a considerable degree. Both books weave together narratives of domesticity and travel. Both books present the day-to-day lives of practicing artists and consider the lives of their artistic influences. Both books recount journeys to literary sacred ground in search

(continued on page 32)

SOUTHNESS

Paul Falardeau

“Short, but sweet,” as the saying goes. It seems that this may be something of a mantra for New York poet, translator, critic and Yale prof Vincent Katz, whose latest release *Southness* is a collection of pared-down verse.

Its cover adorned with a detail from a painting by poet and painter Etel Adnan, *Southness* contains 47 sparse poems. These are often bare and even list-like at times, frequently employing the use of one word lines and mid-sentence breaks. This is not to say that his poems necessarily lack due to their thrifty word count. Katz’ often rich images fade into one another, parading past the mind’s eye like little jewels or scribbled notes on scrap paper and just as quickly are crumpled up; discarded. At times it feels like a reader unfamiliar with Katz’ usual haunts might be missing some key to unlocking meaning in his work and that certainly seems to plague *Southness* intermittently. Mostly the effect is closer to an approximation of Satie’s minimalist Piano compositions. Think Beat stream of consciousness with a Basho’s frugality of language. For example, in “Botanical,” he writes:

*The grass
is beautiful.
So is
the ass.*

*In the
park, people
join, then
Separate.
Flowers
grow, lean
in sun.
You leave.*



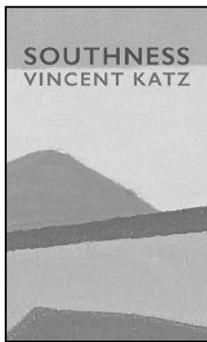
Vincent Katz

The brevity of his work and a pleasurable pallet of imagery are not the only stylistic tool that makes *Southness* a surprisingly challenging piece of work. Though sometimes hidden, meter and rhyme start to materialize, especially when the collection is read aloud. Though initially the verse is somewhat cold, a little effort will begin to reveal the greater depth of the collection. Ultimately, these poems require the reader to slow down, a more contemplative state better suits the hodgepodge bursts of imagery. A meditative willingness to let the images fall away is almost requisite. In “Siren,” for example: “calm winter descending/ clear day’s outlook pond/ sky cream shades/ light sounds roof puddles/hums as in others’/ towns vibrating peace/ inking rest wet/ utmost grace day dies/ sigh last care release/ other saves beyond”

Katz’ work seems to grapple with a balance between the intimate experience of inspiration and the production of work that is universal, hence the minimalist approach. By giving the reader provocative imagery with little to no context (or even complete sentences for long runs of time), it seems like one is challenged to recreate what inspired the writer or something of the reader’s own experience. The struggle of trying to eliminate the ego from a work centered in it is a worthy cause. Sometimes the result is a puzzle missing too many pieces, but Katz’s work seems to be pushing itself; challenging the reader to find the things that are truly universal. In poems such as “Memory,” though, Katz goes right for the throat:

*Soon, she’ll go.
He’ll go, they’ll.
Then life will be*

*just the way you
want it: still,*



Southness
Vincent Katz
Luna Chandelier
Press, 2016, paper,

rested, according

*to schedule and
plan. but it will
be duller then,*

*all the laughter
and confusion,
memory, pale.*

Ultimately, *Southness* is a complicated book, certainly more than it may immediately suggest. It is ambitious and has well-earned payoffs. It’s not perfect, but that’s beside the point, isn’t it?

Paul Falardeau is a frequent contributor to PRRB.

SHIRLEY JACKSON (continued from page 13)



racism and anti-Semitism of the conservative community showed up in many of her stories, along with cold mothers, matricidal daughters and vain, cruel husbands.

Behind her cheery masks, Jackson was hiding an angry vengeful self, dreaming of divorce and flight to a place where she could be alone and write. As the pressures of her domestic role and her own work multiplied, as the marriage became unbearable, she became morbidly obese. She was also a heavy smoker, an alcoholic and an addict of amphetamines, tranquilizers and other prescription drugs. In her last months, her agoraphobia became so severe that she was unable to leave her room.

But on and on she wrote, constantly sharpening her hatchet’s blade. Drawing on journals, diaries and unpublished fiction, Franklin builds up to an explosive ending, as Jackson recorded lurid nightmares, plotted murderous fantasies and planned her escape to “that great golden world outside” in which she would be independent and free. “Writing is the way out,” she told herself in those psychologically tumultuous years. Writing with growing power, discipline and control, she produced her two greatest novels, “The Haunting of Hill House” (1959) and “We Have Always Lived in the Castle.” (The former was made into a supremely horrific film.) Franklin shows Jackson as a deeply gifted master of tone and setting, and a prism of the socio-economic trap into which a female author – especially a writing mother – could not help but be snared.

Richard Wirick practices law in Los Angeles.

M TRAIN (continued from page 13)

Boys grow, father dead, daughter taller than me...” In another passage Smith writes “the things I touched were living. My husband’s fingers, a dandelion, a skinned knee.”

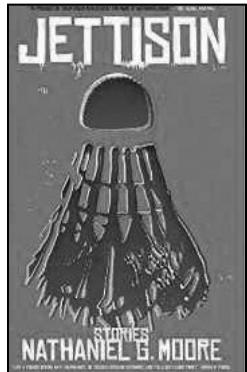
M Train blends Smith’s obsession with the minutia of television shows like *Law and Order*, *The Killing* and *CSI: Miami* with “a longing for the way things were.” Mournful, but far from maudlin, she remembers “a skate key on a cherished lace from the shoe of a 12-year-old boy.” In another passage she writes that “images have their way of dissolving and then abruptly returning, pulling along the joy and pain attached to them like tin cans rattling from the back of an old-fashioned wedding vehicle.”

Smith’s romantic, but not sugary. Her cats are main characters in her isolated life, but they’re not cuddly. In one chapter she wakes to one throwing up on her pillow. *M Train* obsessively documents her everyday losses too. She loses her favourite black coat and her favourite Murakami book. She leaves her favourite camera at the beach and her favourite cafe closes taking her favourite table and chair with it. Late in the book she finds a new cafe out on Rockaway Beach and buys a ramshackle house nearby. Then, Hurricane Sandy hits, destroying the cafe, the beach boardwalk, and the Rockaway neighborhood, but not her house. It’s a redemptive note to the blues-like narrative. She’s building her home amid the rubble, a house and a life built on life’s shifting sand.

Joseph Blake is Music Editor for PRRB.

WESTERN CANADIAN WRITERS DELIVER HIP, MOVING SHORT STORY COLLECTIONS

Paul Falardeau



Jettison: Stories
Nathaniel G. Moore
Anvil Press, 2016,
paper, 287 p.

The short story may yet prove itself to be the dominant form of modern writing. Its brevity and ability to quickly tell a story with impact seems to fit the age of social media and smartphones. Canadian writers have flourished in these waters for some time from Stephen Leacock and P.K. Page to Alice Munro and Eden Robinson. Anvil Press has released short story collections by Nathaniel G. Moore and Martin West that seek to join that pantheon.

Jettison is a hip collection of short fiction by ReLit award-winning author and resident of British Columbia's Sunshine Coast, Nathaniel G. Moore. A theme here seems to be the human jettison. That is, us, all of the ordinary people caught in the wakes of celebrity, pop culture and the ever evolving realities of the corporate world. This is immediately evident in the stories' names, such as "American Psycho," "The Amazing Spiderman" and "Jaws." The focus of these pieces is rarely about superheroes or sharks, but the way that ordinary folks react and interact with such figures,

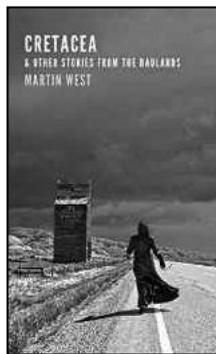
ideas and enterprises. This is hit and miss. Sometimes Moore scores a hit, like with "The Magic Kingdom Empire," where a fledgling member of Disney's legal department tackles less-than-PC characters, Disney's acquisition of the Star Wars franchise, and rides the fine line between love and obsession. Elsewhere, in stories like "Catallus Chainsaw Massacre," Moore gets weighed down in style and loses his characters to cliché and twist endings.

Where he really nails the combination of style and examination is in "Also By Douglas Coupland," in which Moore playfully imagines the future of Canadian literary culture and the publishing world. After a brief introduction where the hyper-elite members of the Canadian Literati throw a wild party to celebrate Douglas Coupland's illustrious now-fifty-year-old career, the narrative switches to alternating between snippets of reviews, back cover blurbs and introductions of Coupland's fictitious future works and the lowly interns of Penguin Canada, who are left clean up after the party. With the sardonic commentary of the de facto janitors (between slurping half-drunk glasses of merlot and pocketing scraps) and the analysis of the issues a future Coupland has faced in his books, Moore creates a fun and enticing look at the future of media and culture in our world.

The primary theme of *Cretacea & Other Stories from the Badlands* is more tangible. These stories all take place in Alberta's Red Deer River Valley, complete with the aching melodramatic tones of small one-horse towns laid over in layers of wild west lawlessness, conservative governments, crude small town freedoms, the tombs of ancient creatures in the hills and everywhere dust and sagebrush. One character in the book's opener, "Not a Bad Man," sums up the Valley: "You can believe in whatever you want and everything still works out."

The slow heat of the setting is really the only constant character, a series of engaging and likeable characters engaged in often less than reputable activities populate the landscape. These are excellent characters developed at a satisfying pace despite the short tenure each gets in the spotlight. Whatever notions of rural small town Alberta the reader may have going in are quickly subverted; these stories are equal parts Yeats and Coltrane as they are Black Label and Canadian Club. In the Alberta, heat reading Faulkner and driving a pickup stocked with pilsner and weed become hazy and altogether hard to delineate.

Still, West does not linger on either. Good and bad; refined and grubby; saved and damned. His characters' dark actions are not necessarily the focus of the stories, although it is possible for one to consider this collection as a sampling of the underbelly of the erstwhile religious and right-wing badlands. Here instead is the impetus for growth—or for a good ol' fashioned sink into oblivion. West's characters grapple with loneliness and boredom, ("Cretacea"), doing the right thing in the face of tantalizing



Cretacea & Other Stories from the Badlands
Martin West
Anvil Press, 2016,
paper, 173 p.

counter-offers ("Dog's Breath") and coming of age with the conflicting idealism and realities of "being a man" ("Not a Bad Man"). This collection is more than just a cross-section of the police blotter in Drumheller. This is a look into the human psyche as it confronts some of its most primal questions. At 57, this is West's first book, but if *Cretacea's* strong characters and setting are any indication, he'll have a future that is worth keeping an eye on.

Paul Falardeau has been published by Subterrain, Cascadia Review and is a regular contributor to PRRB. He lives in Vancouver, BC, writing and brewing beer.

SHIFT (continued from page 4)

"The poem is nothing but information. It is the Constitution of the inner-country. If you declaim it and blow it up with noble intentions, you are no better than the politicians you despise. You are just someone waving the flag and making the cheapest appeal to a kind of emotional patriotism. Do not work the audience for gasps and sighs. If you are worthy of gasps and sighs...it will be in the statistics and not in the trembling of your voice or the cutting of the air with your hands. It will be in the data and the quiet organization of your presence. Avoid the flourish."

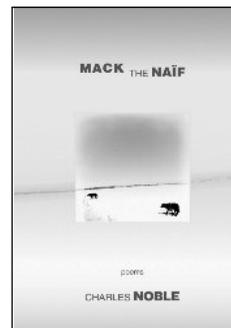
Accessible, quiet, reflective with the small particulars in place, *Shift* is a book to restore sanity. No need for hyper flourish, something like this,

*The sand on the lake bottom
is shaped more like water
than the water is.*

Let's believe in that.

Poet, editor, reviewer, Hannah Main-van der Kamp, lives on the Upper Sunshine Coast where she watches sea planes and reads the Spanish mystics

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Noble's *Mac the Naïf* is all over the place, spinning an incidental mosaic, where mini-narratives or "short hairs" are dropped and picked up to ghost then a trans-narrative over a gallimaufry of pop-up poems, living ends against this kindly arc.

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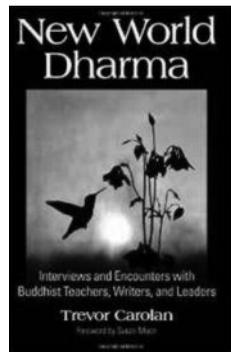
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NEW WORLD DHARMA

Maryse Cardin



New World Dharma
Trevor Carolan
SUNY Press, 2016,
Hardcover, 214 p.

Buddhism has a long history of storytelling and poetry going back to the Buddha himself. *New World Dharma* by Trevor Carolan is a nowadays account of such stories. It is a collection of interviews, and tales about today's followers of the Dharma, whether they are world spiritual leaders, authors, poets, activist-poets or politicians.

This collection is a treat for anyone interested in how the Dharma is lived today. Each chapter is like a window that opens unto the life, adventures, quirks, beliefs and wisdom of some of its famous followers. Some are well known to all like the Dalai Lama, while others are better known in Buddhist circles. All are interesting and living examples of the Dharma in action.

The book is filled with tons of gems. For instance, Carolan describes Japanese poet Nanao Sakaki as a vagabond dharma bard. And his written works as: "Clear as creekwater and rich in nature wisdom, Sakaki's poetry reads like medicine."

Each chapter has an introduction explaining what peaked his interest in a person and how he meets them. Some chapters are presented in a Q&A format, while others are accounts of his encounter. While he always lets his subjects shine, Carolan also shares with us what these dialogues and meetings mean to him.

In doing so, he becomes one of the book's characters. He too is a vagabond dharma bard, a writer-seeker, as he travels far and wide, collecting and writing Dharma stories. He's hiking through the wilderness with one subject, drinking pots of tea with others, attending workshops and readings, or serendipitously recognizing another at a New Mexico airport.

The tale of how he meets his icon the poet Allen Ginsberg, and asks for his signature and guidance, is particularly poignant:

"He looked at me intently, then obliged in a kindly way. The question that burned inside me blurted loose: "You're probably asked this all the time," I said. "But have you any advice for a young writer with ambition?"

I must have looked forlorn, or obsessed.

"So you're a young writer, are you?" he asked professorially.

I nodded.

"And you've got ambition, have you?"

"Yes."

"Well, my advice is to forget it. Forget about ambition," he said flatly. "Just write for yourself and for your friends and anyone who'll listen. Forget about ambition. It's better to be a loser."

"I stood dumbstruck. It's better to a loser? With that, my hero – the world's best-known poet, Allen Ginsberg – walked out the door. I meditated for years on what it might mean.

"I still do."

Carolan is respectful, sometimes almost reverential of his interviewees. You can see what joy he has in spending time with them and sharing with us their wisdom. While many become his friends, he never forgets that they are his teachers. This is how he describes bringing his children to meet Robert Aitken-Roshi at his zendo in Hawaii.

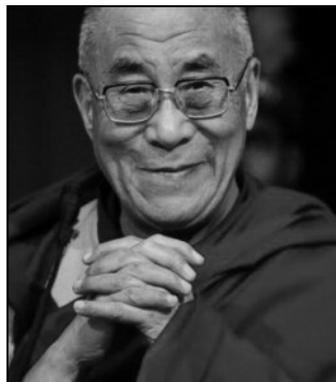
"They liked him and we'd have fun while retaining a certain level of decorum."

Aitken-Roshi later officiates Carolan's marriage to his long term partner:

"We chanted the Heart Sutra and a rainbow shone forth outside after a sudden shower; thirty minutes later, a pod of gray whales began breaching off a beach nearby; it was always special to be in Roshi's company."

In "Embracing the Responsibility of the Moment" he seeks out California governor Jerry Brown and talks to him about global citizenship, social justice and going to Japan to study Zen Buddhism. He asks Brown:

"... How do you try and keep your politics consonant with the idea of there being



The Dalai Lama

a higher way, a virtuous way?"

Jerry Brown: "I don't think politics is distinct from other activities that involve a lot of people. It's as if you're running a store, or a movie theatre, a dot-com business, a park, or being the mayor – there's simply a lot of activity. So a spiritual path to me is about being very clear in what you're doing; being clear in asking, "What is it I'm engaged in now?" From that clarity I make whatever decision I have to make. So for me the spirituality, the path, would be the clarity."

Carolan's wish with this collection is to safeguard the wisdom of these teachers for future generations. In doing so, he also takes his place as one of them. During the reading, I found my mind repeatedly going back to Buddha's poem about the joy of keeping company with the wise. Reading this book, I felt that kind of joy.

*"Being with the wise, like meeting with family, is joyful.
Therefore, one should follow the wise, the intelligent,
the learned, the patient, the dutiful, the noble;
one should follow the good and wise,
as the moon follows the path of the stars."*

– the Buddha

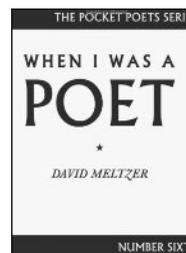
A Zen Buddhist practitioner at North Shore Zendo and former editor of *Japan EcoTimes*, Maryse Cardin is co-author of the textbook *Canadian PR for the Real World*. She writes from West Vancouver.

In memoriam for David Meltzer (1937 - 2016).



*When I was a Poet
I was an Acrobat
a Tightrope Walker
keeping balance
in my slippers
on a wire above
Grand Canyon
Inferno Vertigo*

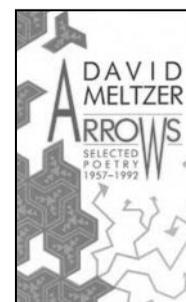
*Oh I did prance the death-defying dance
whereas now
death defines each second
of awaking*



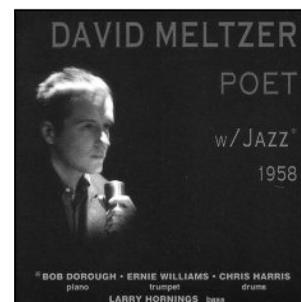
When I Was a Poet
City Lights Pocket
Poets Series



Beat Thing
La Alameda Press,
2004



Arrows
Selected Poetry
1957-1992
Black Sparrow
Press, 1994



BARQUE OF HOBBS

Richard Wirick

I am not greatly familiar with the literature of the sea. I know my *Moby Dick* and *Billy Budd*, but I have yet to open Patrick O'Brien, Herman Wouk, or those many who ply what—describing this book—Hilary Mantel calls the “[M]asterful reconstruction of a lost aquatic world.” Melville’s lesser known *Benito Cereno*, about a slave ship mutiny, and Poe’s *Narrative of A. Gordon Pym*, are my strong favorites from a limited diet. As for now, I do not expect to find anything better of this “lost world,” and the human heart’s darkness that fogs it like a Norse mist, than Ian McGuire’s just-released *The North Water*.

Told from the perspective of an Irish surgeon in need of work, it is a tale of a whaling crew in the mid-Nineteenth Century hunting waters off Greenland and its Northwest Baffin Lands. The captain, Brownlee, is an able mariner, but with nefarious insurance schemes up his sleeve. Cavendish is a navigator and a little more honest, and serves, along with Dr. Sumner, as a mediator between the brutal, enthralling savageries of the heartless seamen. The German Henry Drax, a principal (and quite skilled) harpooner, is something God seems to have forgotten to finish—perhaps out of shame or distaste—when fashioning the most vicious human receptacles of evil. All are British save for Drax and Dr. Sumner, who they at once condescend to and admire for his nationality and his indispensable healing talents.

Cum *Billy Budd*, there are mysterious fatalities and misapprehended suspects. A cabin boy examined by Sumner is suspiciously tight-lipped about his savage rape, and when he is later cut to pieces and curled in a pickling barrel, a “nancy boy”—seen often with effeminate shore mates and an imbecilic loner—is interrogated and chained in the hold as the whaler plies north, racing against the dying hunting season that settles into Lancaster Straight.

The style is ravishingly direct, an echo chamber of the world of men confined to a single purpose but in a place that spawns and incubates their incipient brutality. This description of Drax, as he is examined by the doctor for signs of being the rapist:

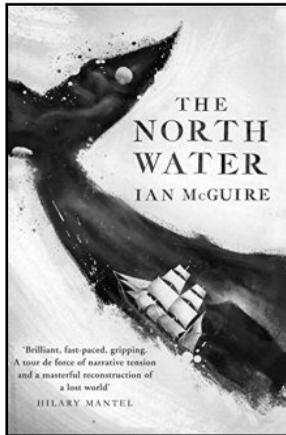
His chest is dark-pelted, broad, and stoutly muscular; his belly is proudly bulbous, both his ankles are covered in a checker-work swirl of blue tattoos . . . He is standing fully naked now—thick-limbed, fistic, unashamed. His face is burned brown and his hands are black from toil, but the rest of his skin—where it is visible beneath the mats of dark hair and panoply of tattooing—is a pure pinkish white like the skin of a babe.

McGuire deftly lets the bestial grow and occlude the angelic in the description, passing like a black cloud over the last smooth sands of innocence. McGuire’s genius is similar to poets such as Heaney, or Homer: strange substantives abound, dazzlingly designed for poetic diction, but just inaccessible enough to transcend the imagination’s feeble dictionary. The floating world is a linguistic stew of bucket-rinds, hatchway casks, flensings and mottles and cleats and swills. It is the brute music of men, only men, and it has the somnolent drone and clang of the bells of walking oxen.

Once a shootout darkens morale, McGuire has a tendency to tell too much and show too little about the dolorous new atmosphere of the below decks. This is especially unsettling in that the directness of his realism leaves no doubt of implications. It’s as if a fat, spidery Henry James walked across the clear, declarative sunlight of a page of Hemingway.

The wheels of justice, the sails of destiny move the cursed crew forward with startling, always plausible narrative mechanics. Civilization, i.e. the port of Hull and its waiting gallows, is like a magnet that pulls, certain and unseen, this band of souls to the sorting-out that awaits them.

There is little wasted here, nearly every page knocking you like the icy plaster of a frozen wave. The inner and outer are melded by narrative tension—its tightening and loosening tracing the interior storms of desperate men, thrown toward doom with something like a blasting, propulsive lightning. It is as if Hardy, with his “personality of landscape,” had written a sea novel. The passive surgeon is the perfect all-seeing,



The North Water
Ian McGuire
Henry Holt
257 pages



Ian McGuire

self-doubting eye that keeps the drifting vessel barely keeled. Until it’s not. The question here is never whether one will survive, but only for how long. It won’t make you want to be a whaler, or even to ever go to sea. But you will wait on the foredeck like a spotter for this writer’s next burst of soaring, sky-splitting craftsmanship.

Richard Wirick is the author of the novel *One Hundred Siberian Postcards* (Telegraph Books) and also *The Devil’s Water* (Ekstasis Editions). He practices law in Los Angeles.

READING SVEVA (continued from page 11)

A fellow practitioner, Marlatt is able to convey her conviction that art is work. In her treatment of the masterpiece *Workmanship*, she is there at the painter’s shoulder, watching, as her aging hands are transformed into their own image on the canvas:

*arthritic bone knobs
boutonnière deformity dip
ochre and ivory wrinkled
fingers of one hand
warming stiffness of the other*

*another you state with a capital
Creator, these so human hands
between brush strokes*

In communing with the mind of this artist, Marlatt also acknowledges the way in which all artists are isolated, sympathetically voicing Caetani’s outsider status in her community:

*called artist
called “our countess”
called a character*

*context small-town Vernon
between the lakes*

In sum, this volume must be understood as a gift. In her introductory essay, Marlatt speaks of the gifts of language and learning that were bestowed upon Sveva, as well as the gift that her completed work represents to Marlatt herself. “The generosity of gifts,” she writes, “—the gifts we inherit and the gifts we are subsequently given—prompts us to offer further gifts to others.” This collection is a gift to the artist, Sveva, a gift of deep understanding. Too late for friendship, it comes in time to correct for Sveva’s years in isolation and despair, and to garner a new audience for the remarkable work of this consummate artist.

Reference

Avery, Karen. *The Elusive Self: Storytelling and the Journey to Identity in Sveva Caetani’s Autobiographical Series, Recapitulation*. Unpublished MA thesis. University of Victoria. 2000.

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

THREE TAKES ON MORTALITY

Linda Rogers

Mortality has always been a preoccupation of lyrical writers, but now the concept has spread from the individual to the universal as greed, global warming, hunger and genocide push everything of which we can conceive to the precipice. The house of cards is falling and inside that burning house, poets continue to raise their voices in protest.

The tone is sorrow as three older poets make way for a new generation as divided as civilisation, between formalists adhering to the construct of the familiar and populists making charts for brave new worlds. As they deal with themes of mortality and legacy, we are informed by their experience.

Vanishing Act, a gathering of poems in different voices, is an experiment in form by a master of mysterious (mystery) writing, as we are given to consider different formulations for end days, random thoughts and formal variations on *carpe diem* and the human elegy. It could be the transformed novelist is contemplating the death and possible resurrection of poetry as he shifts form, from *pantoum* to prose poem in the age of spoken word, rhetoric versus lyric, page versus stage, the new religion, whatever that is, and the shape of his narrator(s).

"Anoint yourself."

His various characters, male and female, even the anthropomorphic car that "answer(s) easily to the slightest suggestion," witness the grand events, sex, death and the little deaths, sexual and otherwise.

All night I dreamed of signposts the highway and its long slow curves. Music in the background, Many accidents.

These theatrical events: sleight of hand, card tricks, snow and ash that fall from the sky after tiny explosions, manifest as confetti or snow, ash from the deadly chimneys.

*You who cannot love me shove me
Off to finer kingdoms with a prayer*

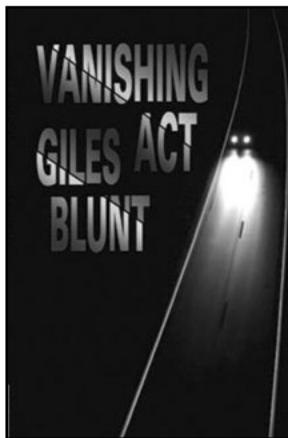
This is the way love and the world ends, vanishes, in incantation, little explosions of dust, "Pouf!" Matter, words appear and disappear on pages designed and allowed, all of them mined with accepted wisdom that scatters as the pages are turned. It might be the fault in a carefully crafted song, "too holy to be sung," or the stutter in a prose poem, the word "dock" repeated once too often for convention, so we stop to ask, is the child, "three parts wishes one part dreams" really nailing his sunfish to "clock" not dock, dissonance thrown in because

*Part of me
Wants to kill me
That's the part
I want to meet.*

"Meet" is the operative word as his chorus sings into the void, becoming the ways in which we are mortal, where human harmonizes with humanity, the collective noun that shouts over the bomb, a lethal concept we have received as cool in the urban vernacular.

It was not the identical voice I was hearing now but the tone was much the same. What man shall die what girl be free? Whom to love, to what degree?

We sense that vanishing is a relief, the relinquishing of control, of plot, maps that hold down the soul. In this book, the car relaxes and the navigator suspends disbelief. So much is revealed when the trickster takes off his feather jacket and is left alone with his voices. Poetry is closest to the bone.



Vanishing Act
Giles Blunt
Exile Editions, 2016

bill bissett, still relevant to younger audiences, balances multiple platforms, different genres, different ways of being, corporal, ephemeral, healthy, unhealthy, solvent and stuck, of sound and unsound mind. *th book* is a catalogue of prescriptions for getting through the pain, and this time more than before he doesn't flinch at the details.

bill encouraged us to watch a film, *Voices*, about the lethal edge of paranoia. We were surprised by its violence, but given he has recently endured the duller blows of a heart attack and the accidental deaths of his daughter and grandson, objective conversation about mental illness and mortality makes sense. His new writing reflects that sharper grasp of reality, the knife's edge and snake pits that trip our lofty intentions.

I suspect that some readers buy bill bissett's books of poetry and drawings as artefacts, sentimental reminders of a theatrical reading or vernissage. That's a pity because the art of reading bill is quite simple and very rewarding. He paints with words and music, orchestrating the apparent randomness of creation with an ironic intelligence that leaps just as high off the page as it does on stage.

As with the masters Joyce and Woolf, bissett should (a word he never uses) be read with the ear, last words for the dying and the dying planet, or not. It is only a slight adjustment, one that opens an important portal for accepting the deeper meaning of language. His idiosyncratic syntax is intentionally aural and in no small part, rebellious.

Maintaining his real provenance was in the mating of the planets Zatria and Lunaria, this son of conservative Halifax dared to be different, in singing, dancing and painting outside the family lines. A Ballet Boy, until his ruptured appendix ended that dream, soon banished himself from this culture of conformity and has maintained a bi-coastal presence since the Sixties. His paintings and poems record a fearless passage through strawberry minefields, a life of joy and celebration, tragedy and loss.

*remembr aftr th shock n rebuild
ing yr mind from th ground up th
gud memoreez can help yu thru*

Grief and illumination are the themes of *th book*, compost that sings. The poem "whn my fathr n dottr first met in hev'n" is about hard truths and redemption, the romantic possibility of redemption when different perspectives meet in a holy place. The poet's father, a seemingly unyielding judge, hindsight reveals as a courageous fighter for civil rights.

That is the meaning of bissett, the shaman. We are lines that intersect and interact. In his perfect world, there are no degrees of separation as we move in and out, interact, love and accept one another. There is no nationality, no gender, nothing but complementing complementary colours in the ideal spectrum of lightning and magic rainbows, where the most powerful weapon is transformative humour without cruelty, peace.

*chill n watch th sunsets th answr being
in natural beautee n the flow uv
the birds up wards up up n ovr these
wings*

Always a voyeur, Joe Rosenblatt first stalked his prey in windows and picture frames, an urban poetry populated by urban goddesses. Next, his ambition was to sight the brides of the stream. Now, in his ninth decade, he has retreated to the woods where his muses, birds in the bush, flit in the gaps between branches, cracks where light is revealed. The Iron Man, his earlier spirit guide, has become Green Man leading him



th book
bill bissett
Talonbooks, 2016



The Bird in the Stillness
Joe Rosenblatt
Porcupine's Quill,
2016

(continued on page 29)

CHEWING WATER

Sharon Berg

On November 20th, 2015, Nelson Ball won the prestigious bp Nichol Chapbook Award for his chapbook *Small Waterways*, published by Cameron Anstee's Aptopress. It is a prestigious award, coming towards the end of a long career as a poet. In fact, Ball has authored more than 40 books and chapbooks, and it happens that the poems in his winning chapbook are included in his latest book, *Chewing Water*, by Mansfield Press (2016).

Ball is a minimalist, and a self-described nature poet. He observes. He ponders. He contemplates. He makes connections to his subject and, in the process of reading his work, the reader makes personal connections, often feeling they are present with him. He asks us to see through his eyes and his minimalisms leave the audience the space to do so. He is entertaining, yet he draws out the ability of each reader to consider their own thoughts. It is as if he points to something and says, There.

*Think about that.
for weeks
motionless*

*until
last evening*

*it lifted
each leg*

*slowly
deliberately*

*high
stepping*

(Spider)

Who has never seen a spider do what he is describing? Yet, he asks us all to look again and consider his spider as well as our own. Whether we reconsider a child who asks "Why?" (The Quest For Knowledge), the phrase "it is what it is" (The Meaning of Life), a physical illness (My Tinnitus Crickets), or the rattles and creaks of an old house when you live alone (Windy Night), what makes Ball a powerful poet is his ability to achieve a reconsideration of our common experiences.

Ball addresses a multitude of simple situations, such as how a farmer addresses the decay of abandoned buildings (Orderliness), reflection on his childhood activities as an adult (I Chased Birds), or far larger topics (The Meaning of Life). He brings important introspection to all of them, but it is his use of space through line breaks and his skill with suggestion that opens the reader to interpreting moments in their own life simultaneously.

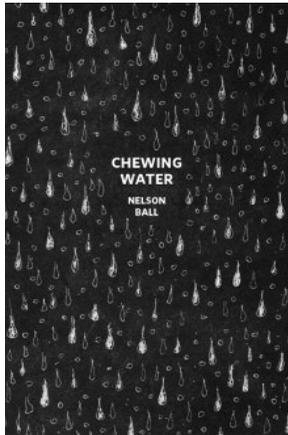
*shadows
jiggle*

*on the steps
beside me*

*bringing
to light*

*an unfelt
breeze*

(Juniper)



Chewing Water
Nelson Ball
A Stuart Ross Book
2016, paper

In some cases, Ball demonstrates how interactions with others come under the spotlight simply because he spends so much time alone in his cavernous home. His list of topics within a conversation are immortalised by a poem as moments frozen in time. It is a process similar to looking at the specimens preserved in glass jars in a nature scientist's laboratory.

*We settled in to a serious talk – Catherine's project
for a kids summer camp at Wilfred Laurier University,*

*my poet friend who's writing twelve books,
my stalled book of poems for Laurier.*

*When time to leave, Catherine couldn't find her purse.
Her friend pointed, and as Catherine picked it up, said*

*"Now you've put girl cooties on Nelson's shoes."
(Affiliations and Afflictions)*

There is a feeling of detachment overwhelmed by severe longing and gratitude for the moments he spends with people he cares about, which is appreciated through humour tucked between the strata of memory in a poet-archaeologist's study. Again and again, especially in moments when Ball considers his soul mate, Barbara Caruso, the reader is gifted with moments of affection, moments remembered in their relationship, and those small moments of reflection on their intimacy that prove the genuine nature of one's connection to another human being through playing with it. He remembers her teasing:



Nelson Ball (Photo: Catherine Stevenson)

*She was the most serious and focused person
I have ever known. Almost one-track.*

*But she could be playful, too. Standing
in front of me, she*

*would snuggle her nose
into my shirt pocket*

(Barbara and Me)

Every now and again, Ball highlights bits of information you might wish you'd never learned, such as: "fecal/ transplant/ therapy" (Recycling), but other poems play on his strong sense of irony through the archaic meaning of words encountered in everyday life in contrast with what is actually present today (Farmer's Deli Plaza). Some poems open windows on the tremendous grief he continues to endure over the loss of his wife (She Would Have Named Them Nubbies), even as they explain the tremendous joy he experiences in his present day friendships (My Friend Catherine).

Ball sets up endearing contrasts. One can see him interacting with his friends at a dinner party and imagine Nelson researching, even as he explains how human lives are tied to the migration of flies (Friends and Flies). In one poem, he takes you back to a moment during palliative care for his wife's abdominal cancer when:

*I rubbed her skin – arms, abdomen, back, sides, and legs-
every day with a pair of cotton garden gloves.*

*Little bumps or piles formed on the gloves
made them more effective.*

(She Would Have Named Them Nubbies)

He ends the poem by revealing: "I have the gloves, but I don't wear them", illustrating

both the pain of his loss and his continued connection to her in a moment before she passed out of his life through the preservation of those same gloves.

Words are Ball's most constant companion in the cavernous old building where he lives. He enjoys playing with words and their meaning, words through history and language (Yacht) and words through their morph into common usage (Words). He also loves images, both those of his artist wife and those which we find in every day life. For instance, he captures the image of a plastic flag blown by the wind on a twig in the brilliant amber of a poem, preserving it long into a future we cannot yet foretell.

*Snagged
on a dead weed*

*a plastic bag
wavers in the breeze like a flag*

*tugs
the bending stalk*

(Signs: May)

Ball portrays the tiniest moments in his poems, which, in turn, opens up huge areas of thought, allowing the reader to ponder their own meaning (Where-ness). He reflects on private moments, which then become public contemplations of children imitating the actions of their elders.

*gathered around the aquarium
at the back of the classroom*

*fishing for goldfish
with a staple tied to a string*

(Fishing)

In one of my favourite poems in the collection, he contemplates his relationship

to trees ("This Close To Being A Tree"). Yet, he ends the procession of poems in this book with another beauty, one that delineates the importance of small moments in the life of any relationship, and perhaps one that helps him to deal with his profound sense of loss:

*I stood at the foot of Barbara's hospital bed
as she wavered into consciousness*

*opened her eyes, smiled, said, "Nelson,
you are covered all over with butterflies*

*flying out from your elbows."
"Really?" I said. "Yes, they are nice" she replied*

*I was overjoyed she was alive –
The butterflies were a bonus.*

(After Major Surgery)

I am overjoyed that Nelson Ball was willing to reveal himself to be a man who is at once vulnerable, thoughtful, and determined to look at the irony, the heartache, the joy, and the humour that exist in life. This book is a well-crafted gift that shares both the moments in nature that touch the artist, his awareness of loss, his positive outlook, and several minimalist portraits of his relationships with the artist Barbara Caruso and other friends. In addition, the notes on the poems included at the end of this collection are, as he might put it a true bonus. They offer important glimpses into the making of Nelson Ball's poetry. That is a practise that should be repeated by publishers more often. Mansfield Press has done a wonderful job in designing this book. Congratulations are also due to a very fine author for winning an award that is long overdue.

Sharon Berg is a Canadian author of poetry, fiction and non-fiction. She worked as an elementary school teacher until she retired in 2016. She currently lives in Sarnia, Ontario.

FOR YOUR SAFETY PLEASE HOLD ON

Katie Stobbart

*"I think the world is running out
of poetry. We can't prove there will be more clear days
to compare to apples" (Czaga, "Poetry Shortage").*

Meet Kayla Czaga. For this volume of poems is, among other things, your introduction to a new, strong voice in Canadian poetry. Where many modern poems can be described as convoluted, Czaga's verse is clear and solid: accessible but no less nuanced than her contemporaries.

For Your Safety Please Hold On, words derived from the advisory sticker on the windows of public transit buses and trains, is divided into five sections: Mother & Father, The Family, For Play, For Your Safety Please Hold On, and Many Metaphorical Birds. In keeping with the idea of transit, Czaga takes the reader from home and childhood through the city to revelation. This also gives the collection a steady, story-like arc from start to finish. It makes sense then, that the third and fourth sections are the climactic points of the book, and contain some of the strongest poems. In *For Play*, "Gertrude Stein Loves a Girl" is a five-part poem written in a style emulating Stein, and was recognized with the Malahat Review's Far Horizons award for poetry in 2012. Most of my own favourites are from the (fourth) title section. "23rd Birthday" and "Poetry Shortage" each convey a kind of yearning: the first for connection and love, and the second for creative inspiration. In the former, Czaga writes:



For Your Safety Please Hold On
Kayla Czaga
Nightwood Editions,
2016,
paper, 95 p.



Kayla Czaga

*Maybe I'll collect puddles
or clock out like so many people I've seen
on buses, that man who wept*

*violently into his scarf and the rest
of us trying to ignore him, turning up
our not-listening devices. Tonight*

*I am twenty-three and looking
for someone gentle enough to hold back*

my hair—this could be you, stranger

This desire for understanding and connection are not exclusive to the later parts of the book; it can be traced back to its roots in the section focused on the speaker's parents—I'm inclined to read some of the earlier poems with the same speaker as "23rd Birthday" and "Poetry Shortage." In "Another Poem About my Father" Czaga crafts an image, thick with nostalgia, of a parent who by the end of the poem feels familiar and endearing: giving his daughter an enormous sack of small change, with the kicker of dragging it to the bank to deposit, a man who surprises his wife with live birds, and seeks out treasures with a metal detector. In this poem Czaga introduces a simile comparing poems and people that seems to link the yearnings in the later poems I've mentioned together: "My father

(continued on page 45)

BOB DYLAN, THE BEATS' NOBEL PRIZE

Joseph Blake

It's too bad that Allen Ginsberg didn't live to see his friend Bob Dylan receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. While lit-crit prats like Russell Smith and Irvine Welsh took cheap shots at Dylan's award by poking fun at the Swedish judges and Bob's first-generation of fans, most of Dylan's peers from Leonard Cohen and Tom Waits to Bruce Springsteen and Steve Earle spoke glowingly of Dylan's artistry and the award's fitting tribute for his long career. Sharing a stage with Dylan at the Desert Trip festival the night of the award, Mick Jagger called Bob "our own Walt Whitman."

When I studied with Ginsberg at Naropa, one of his most important teachings was that poetry was stillborn on the page. Poetry had to be spoken...or sung. Ginsberg used many instruments including his beloved harmonium and finger cymbals to back his poems and songs, "to bring them into the world."

Ginsberg praised Dylan's work for "returning poetry to the human body through the medium of music" and also lauded Dylan's "chains of flashing images." The older poet saw a direct line from Kerouac and the Beat Movement back to Whitman's work and Blake's sung poems in Dylan's songs. For his part Dylan has written "I didn't start writing poetry until I was out of high school. I was 18 or so when I first discovered Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, Frank O'Hara and those guys."

On the *Bringing It All Back Home* album cover notes, Dylan's fifth LP released in 1965, Bob wrote, "why allen ginsberg was not chosen to read poetry at the [Presidential] inauguration boggles my mind."

Bringing It All Back Home's first cut, "Subterranean Homesick Blues" is a seminal speed rap that would make any Beat poet proud. The song's video also includes a cameo appearance by Ginsberg. The LP is a brilliant mélange of the musician's country, blues, rock, and Beat influences. The LP also includes his monumental hit "Like A Rolling Stone," a record that transformed radio playlists and brought song writing into a new era

Springsteen has said that "Elvis freed your body. Bob Dylan freed your mind." In his new autobiography Springsteen writes, "Bob Dylan is the father of my country. *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Bringing It All Back Home* were not only great records, but they were the first time I can remember being exposed to a truthful vision of the place I lived."

Before Dylan unleashed these mid-60s masterpieces and the mercurial, double-record *Blonde on Blonde* (all three released in 16 months! Talk about following Kerouac's dictum "first thought, best thought"?), before "Desolation Row" with "Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot fighting in the captain's tower", Dylan had already remade folk music in his own image with dozens of powerful songs like "Blowin' in the Wind", "The Times They Are a Changin'", and "Masters of War". Against a backdrop of civil rights marches, Vietnam war, black power, student revolt, urban rebellion, and the unraveling of the American Empire, Dylan sang a soundtrack of original genius. By the late 1960s he hid out in Woodstock with The Band to produce pop's first bootleg hit LP, *The Basement Tapes/Great White Wonder*, and in the midst of rock's love affair with psychedelic excess, the stripped-down, Bible-inspired *John Wesley Harding*. He married rock and country forms, even changed his trademark, crowing vocals to offer a melodious, country croon on *Nashville Skyline*, foreshadowing the Americana movement in alt-rock 30 years later.



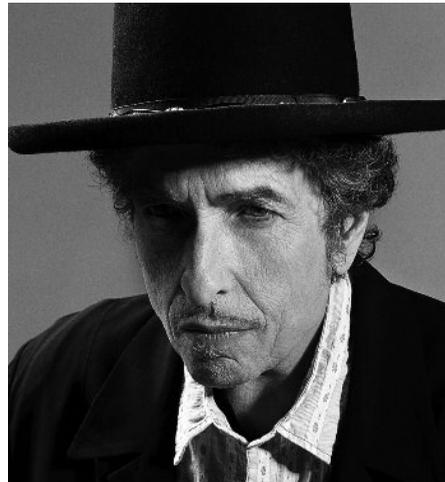
Bob Dylan

A trio of fundamentalist Christian recordings including the masterful song "Gotta Serve Somebody" served notice of another musical turn in the early 1980s. By the end of that decade and 30 years into his career, Dylan was touring with the Grateful Dead and launching what would become his "Never Ending Tour", a schedule

of more than 100 live performances every year that has continued to this day. At 75, he keeps a touring schedule that would kill younger musicians.

Over his long career's studio albums, Dylan has released dozens more live recordings, compilations and official bootleg albums along with a pair of albums in the 1990s where he covers folk, blues and country tunes by the likes of Blind Willie McTell, Dock Boggs and the Mississippi Shieks, songs reflecting what critic Greil Marcus calls "old weird America."

These seemingly simple but mysterious songs of longing and ambiguity foreshadow Dylan's late-season masterpieces, a series of mature, spooky gems beginning



Bob Dylan

with 1997's award-winning *Time Out of Mind*. That evocative, Daniel Lanois-produced recording and Dylan's self-produced *Love and Theft* (2001) and *Tempest* (2012) are three of my favourite Dylan albums, messages from a wise old man from the deep darkness of his soul.

From the *Desert Trip* stage the night of his Nobel Prize award announcement, Dylan finished his set with "Ballad of a Thin Man" with its sneering "Something is happening, but you don't know what it is—do you Mr. Jones?" He came back out with his veteran, cowboy band to encore on a thunderous "Like A Rolling Stone" before ending the show with a reading of "Why Try To Change Me Now", a song from his

recent Sinatra-inspired LP.

After causing consternation for a couple of weeks with his silence regarding the award and ignoring the Nobel committee's invitation to a celebratory party, Dylan finally told the Swedish Academy, "I appreciate the honour so much. The news about the Nobel Prize left me speechless."

Leonard Cohen put the award in a clearer perspective, writing that Dylan's Nobel was "like pinning a medal on Mount Everest for being the highest mountain." Dylan's a great word-slinger whose songs borrow from Rimbaud and Baudelaire, Shakespeare and the Bible. His music is a mash-up of Woody Guthrie, Hank Williams, Little Richard, Charlie Patton, Howlin' Wolf and Smokey Robinson, and much, much more. For me, Dylan's alongside Picasso and Louis Armstrong as the most important artists of the 20th Century and he's still going strong two decades into the 21st. He's earned his Nobel Prize and our love.

Joseph Blake is Music Editor for PRRB.



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What a writer learns from Cendrars is to follow his nose, to obey life's commands, to worship no other god but life.

~ Henry Miller

The only true things that prevent you from cursing and reviling life are saints, children, flowers and birds, lunatics, the gratuitous gifts that come to you from God knows where, harvest workers and innocent souls. Without these life would be impossible.

~ Blaise Cendrars

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THREE POEMS

Peter Dale Scott

Obscure Lady

*Cara beltà che amore
Lunge m'inspiri o nascondendo il viso,
Fuor se nel sonno il core*

*Ombra diva mi scuoti,
O ne' campi ove splenda
Più vago il giorno e di natura il riso...*

*(Beloved beauty who inspires
love from afar, your face concealed
except when your celestial image
stirs my heart in sleep, or in the fields
where light and nature's laughter
shine more lovely...)*

— Leopardi, *Alla Sua Donna*

“As you must know, there was much material about your father in Sandra Djwa's book about P.K. Page. It must be odd for you to read, but your father came across as a very sympathetic figure, I thought.”

— Tracy Ware

A glimpse last night...
a smile...
a laugh that was my own heart laughing...

I had not seen you for decades
after my first solitary miserable
experiences of adulthood

when I would sing of you
down vineyard lanes
in a country and a language not my own

*Te viatrice in questo arido suolo
Io mi pensai. Ma non è cosa in terra
Che ti somigli*

*(I imagined you a fellow voyager
on this arid soil. But there is nothing on earth
that resembles you)* Leopardi *Alla Sua Donna*

too much in love
with this scrap of Leopardi
to deal with the Albertan in Paris

who practiced Poulenc each morning
for some international competition
on the basement piano

in the Maison Canadienne
even though I had been assured
she had a crush on me

Now for decades I have not missed you
except when I open my mind
for a few minutes each morning

to the purely imaginable
when you never come
desire reaching out to empty space



F.R. Scott

not wasted, since what has enforced
your absence was my revisiting
those very same vineyard lanes

on my first honeymoon with Maylie
and now more recently my first
sustainable happy marriage

So why now? yes, I have an urgent deadline
that's when poems come, but never you
It must have been TV last night

the moment of Roosevelt's death
when Eleanor coming to retrieve the body
learned that the woman with him when he died

was the woman who thirty years before
had broken their marriage, or, no,
not broken it completely, but reduced it

to something merely practical and useful
leaving him free to romance the world
with an intriguing smile, masking great pain

and yet cheerful enough to save
if not his wife and himself
at least the country from depression

He was in thrall to Power
even though, to those who deal with her up close
she is a Unkempt Whore, *una puttana sciolta* *Purg 32:149*

but why am I talking Roosevelt
and why I am glad
neurosis made him a great President

who got factories to reopen
put millions back to work
the best crisis leaders it is said

are always *mentally ill*
or *mentally abnormal*
when all this (as I only realize

Ghaemi A First-Rate Madness 17

weeks after last night's visit)

is not really about FDR
but about FRS — my father

in his own time of pain
that silent dinner
when he finally said to my mother

he had *night work at the office*
and I still an undergraduate
took the bus down to McGill

and confirmed his window was dark
A big deal? can a darkened window
affect a whole life? I think of you

cara beltà, and of my lifelong
inquiries of monks
and of that woman whose talk

in the darkness of her dingy basement flat
turned to what I thought untimely
allusions to another man

and now there is a whole book
about a well-known poet
in which her *scandalous romance*

with my father *takes centre stage* *Ball Winnipeg Free Press*
and a book to come surely
about the artist Paterson Ewen

who suffered breakdown and electroshock
after his wife foolishly believed
my father would marry her *Graham Canadian Art Fall 1996*

And as for my father Well
he had a public heart
and did much for Canadian civil rights

winning 2 *landmark legal cases*
before the Supreme Court *Canadian Encyclopedia*
and the truth is I too loved him

not just for having shared
his brilliant conversation
but also to have learned

from his skill and patience
how to make a campfire with wet wood
by shaving twigs when there was no birch bark

the inner heart as I have written
of that public man *Scott Minding the Darkness 79*
and not least his faith that became mine

in a cosmic order tending towards peace
So have I accepted he was not perfect?
and does this explain my own obsession

with the imperfections of the Unkempt Lady?
and is this why you
cara donna di beltà

when you came back last night
in the darkness a second time
jocund with energy

it was to say good-bye
as if confirming
that the two of us

so intimate in my youthful pain
were now not for each other?

September 21, 2014

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A Prayer for My Granddaughter

For Marianna

Yeats in his tower battered by sea winds
Studied his cradled daughter with great gloom.
No longer buoyed by earlier hopes that art
Could calm a tormented nation's frenzied heart,
All argument futile now, when war
Brought ragged soldiers to his very door,
He prayed she grow to be of a different mind,
Freed from the hatreds still surrounding him.

Four decades later my Zen Buddhist wife
At our children's births, when fixed bayonets
Lined our own streets, repeated Yeats's prayer
That a child be spared the fury of the strife
shared both by sheriffs and the militants,
Recover the soul's radical innocence
And establish concord in a house
Graced by custom and by ceremony.

Thus surely grounded, our children chose,
Not caring for the way this country tends,
To leave their university careers:
Cassie to live and work among the poor
My sons to earn a living as musicians,
While John, your father, to our surprise,
The first in the family not to be baptized
At birth, led services at church for years.

Thus you, Marianna, have been provided
With a glimpse of worlds beyond experience.
While all around you others not so guided
Are listless from undefined identity,
Your house returns to custom: Latin grace
At meals, home schooling, music, no TV,
Hamsters, psalms, ballet, the whimsical chance
To dress like Alice in a Victorian dress.

Those wavelets on our bay are never wild,
Our wars are fought on distant continents.
Yet you, however well protected, fled
(While gulls flew in towards us to be fed)
A clod on the trail you feared was a dead bird.
I pray that you, now ten, will draw on faith
To be equanimous when facing death,
Know when to withdraw, when not to be deterred.

I wish that I could guarantee a world
 Where kindness is requited, as were best.
 But now for a half century or more
 This country has continued to make war,
 Reaping war's harvest: hatred, drugs and crime.
 May you still learn which instincts to obey
 Until it is painful to have inflicted pain
 And generosity makes you happiest.

May you be different from those who seek
 Authenticity in what's unique,
 Dismissing the commonplace as mere cliché.
 Be prompted by your own simplicity
 So that you will be rooted like a tree
 Nourished by living water, yielding fruit,
 Whose leaves will not be torn by blustering gales
 Nor wither from the drought of rootless thought.

Be rooted, not too rooted. Reach like Yeats
 Up out from nature into artifice.
 Master your steps of classical ballet
 Contorting natural impulse into grace
 With the refined mastery of those before you
 Till you are moved by such intuition
 Music itself will guide you in the dance
 to where is no memory and no anticipation.

Auden "Ballet's Present Eden"

Tasting and Seeing

("to act by not acting, to know by not knowing" – Taoist proverb)

Last night, in *shul*, as we sang *L'kha dodi*
 to greet the bride Shabbat, we all turned,
 before the last stanza, to the door behind us
 and welcomed in a presence not ourselves,
 the *Shekinah*, entering to be wed.
 I too, not really Jewish, sensed this change,
 the mystic entrance of the unseen bride
 Shabbat, the queen of peace and future peace.

divine presence

And this morning, in church, we sing and turn again
 to look behind us, for the arrival
 ("Burst into song, you mountains and your trees")
 of eight-year-old queens in white with coronets,
 boys in white ties, and you, my grandson Peter,
 about to be enhanced by your first taste
 of paschal wafer and consecrated wine —
 your entrance too inspires the rest of us.

Isaiah 44:23

My knees, once more as they now so rarely are
 on a prayer bench, are no longer quaking
 as they did decades ago, out of passionate
 uncertainty and doubt, when I, in France,
 still a lapsed socialist, was brought by chance
 to Taizé's little commune of twelve monks,
 and, reading Gilson and Emile Mâle,
 first glimpsed the future hidden in our past.

French medievalists

Now I feel more secure, next to the knees
 of my whole family, all of you — more than I,
 this firm bench seems to tell me — all secure
 (as my own parents were in unbelief —
The future of man was my father's heaven),
 confirmed by the weekly rituals you share
 from dress, prayer, and the words of grace
 we say each meal before we dine together,

recited for centuries, like *L'kha dodi*,
 and, I imagine, likely to survive
 this present age of zealots and crusaders
 waging war until they all are gone,
 leaving behind as residues such faiths
 as this one, with a creed that stayed alive,
 enforced through time by conquering emperors —
 this faith with which you, Peter, will commune.

Here in this church, blacks, Filipinos,
 Chinese, Mexicans now line up to sing
O taste and see that the Lord is good,
 the Thirty-fourth Psalm — *O contemplate*
 in my Stone edition of the Hebrew Bible,
 but in traditional Christian English, *taste*
 (— *taam* — of *Sapience no small part*,
 as Adam said, to justify his fall).

Psalm 34:8

Paradise Lost 9:1018
 cf. Exodus 16:31, I Sam 25:33

Not really Catholic, I still confess
 I love the mass, though somewhat in the way
 I was awed by the carvings of Angkor Wat,
 or the mystic stones at Carnac, still more
 the prostrate hundred thousands at Czestochowa,
 or those in the northern Thailand Buddhist wat,
 where I, like the Thais around me, clutched my string
 conveying *metta* from the monks up front,

temple

loving-kindness

always a witness to others' certain faith
 confirming my own faith in the uncertain
 and these families who came to America,
 just as Merton and Rabbi Heschel came
 from Europe's collapse to Winthrop's commonwealth,
 or the Safed *rebbe* in flight from Greece
 who wrote that the Kabbala bride of peace, Shabbat,
 foretells *the city rebuilt on her hill*.

Shlomo Alkabetz

L'kha dodi 26; cf. Isaiah 44:28

It is hot outside. As we go off to lunch,
 Peter's tie is gone. Again he wears
 an open shirt and Star Wars baseball cap,
 back in this world where changes rarely change,
 and again himself. Yet more than his old self —
 a communicant (since earthly cities fail)
 with a mystery beyond this daily life
 which has been tasted and which has been seen.

* * *

After the burnings and forced conversions,
 The crusaders forcing others to be free,
 Amazing grace, if we confront disaster,
 Stricken as Paul Celan was, are we wrong
 To sing again in praise, kumi uri
 "Stand up"? The heart has always had its reasons,
 Sometimes profound, sometimes in grisly error
 Whose violence is undeterred by prayer;
 But what of the mysteries of peace we taste in song?

Celan 314 *L'kha dodi* 23

Is 60:1 tr. Meister Eckhart

Alameda, California, May 4, 2013

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Peter Dale Scott is a former Canadian diplomat and English Professor at the University of California, Berkeley. The son of noted Canadian poet and constitutional lawyer F.R. Scott and painter Marian Dale Scott, who was born in Montreal, Canada on January 11th, 1929, has attracted a lot of attention throughout the years for his transparent and heavily-footnoted political writings. He is the author of several books of poetry, among Minding the Darkness. He lives in Berkeley California.

INTRIGUING SCENARIOS

Brian Campbell

This year saw a quiet yet momentous event in Canadian letters: the release by publisher Wolsak & Wynn of a handsome bilingual edition of *Vesuvio/Vesuvius*, a volume of poems by the extraordinary Brazilian poet Zulmira Ribeiro Tavares translated into English by Hugh Hazelton. It was a quiet event in that, considering the current torrent of publication, the production of a single volume of translated poetry can be all too easily overlooked. It was momentous for its rarity: a volume produced by an arts-council supported press of work by a distinguished foreign author. Canadian arts councils as a rule value literary translation as part of the national dialogue, and thus tend to fund translations from work by Canadian citizens only. In view of the quality of Tavares' work, we can only be thankful that the publisher financed the project herself.

Zulmira Ribeiro Tavares is one of Brazil's most important and distinctive authors. Born in São Paulo in 1930, where she has lived all her life, she has published nine books — novels, short stories, poetry, essays—won numerous awards (among them the prestigious Jabuti Award, 1993) and been widely translated. *Vesuvio*, shortlisted for the Jabuti in 2012, is her first work exclusively of poetry, and constitutes, Hazelton tells us in his introduction, a kind of axis of her work. It is also the first full-length collection of poetry by Tavares translated into English.

What we discover in the pages of *Vesuvius* is a poetry of strange, limpid powers. While Tavares' poetry features occasional warm flashes of surprising juxtaposition redolent of Neruda or Vallejo, for the most part she is cooler in her register, more urbane, oblique, whimsical. Her work, for a reader of Latin American literature, is more likely to bring to mind at once the bold yet self-effacing satire of Nicanor Parra and the labyrinthine meditations of Jorge Luis Borges.

The volume is divided into seven parts, interrelated fascicles whose titles indicate the tenor of the work: Installations, Ultralight, Figures, Seasons, Left-Handed Lyric, Stages/Stagings, and Gloss. The work itself is a mixture of prose poems, many of them circuitous and complex, and brief lyrics (with one or two exceptions) that arrive more swiftly and directly to their effects.

Favourites among the prose poems include "The Stain of Colour," "Below the Poverty Line," and "The Paradox of Ghosts," and the final, most elaborately entitled poem, "Proposals with Birds and Leaves that the Observer Extends to Human Ingenuity with a Certain Reference to the Heart."

"The Paradox of Ghosts" begins with a simple but original assertion:

*There are two types of ghosts:
the real ones and the fakes.*

A real ghost, Tavares continues, "brings to mind the purest crystal, but without a single bit of reflected light." These ethereal beings draw attention to themselves — and to each other — through a "slight tart noise...that breaks the smoothness of the air", as when "two crystal glasses touch." Oddly enough, this makes them "congratulate one another."

A fake ghost is more the usual ghost cliché. It "wears a huge white sheet thrown over what's inside," with "an eyehole like a burka. Or else it's a blind burka." In what amounts to a delightful bit of farce, the fake ghost "often... misses its improvised sight hole [so it] stumbles over its own feet, and falls with a boom, or else tumbles down the stairs, letting loose a cavernous roar." Fake ghosts, she concludes, "are the most terrible, because they exist." The liar's paradox, with its hall of mirrors of ironic logical implications, is immediately brought to mind.

Consisting of intriguing, miniature scenarios most often related in the third person, Tavares's poetic creations stand alone, while the author's wise, reserved presence sits behind, sombre or



Vesuvio/Vesuvius
Zulmira Ribeiro Tavares,
translated by Hugh Hazelton.
Wolsak & Wynn
2015. paper 127 pp.



Zulmira Ribeiro Tavares

wanly smiling. Here, a devastating short lyric that needs no paraphrase:

Way

*He lived a hard life —
a hard silent life.
Like an empty shoe
without a shoelace he lived.
A weak-legged shoe
drifting along
without him inside. He lived
outside himself
a hard simple life.
He took off his shoes to sleep
on a stone. Without a groan —
a sound of falling.*

Here, a poem in a more typically light-hearted vein, also quoted in full:

Philosopher in Springtime

*He doesn't like to show he's thinking
because it doesn't seem to him very real.
He disguises it, pretending to watch
the small bird drinking water in the eaves*

*of the roof — of his whitewashed stone house
where he lives with his stone whitewashed family.
Where could the real be, he wonders pensively
afraid that sooner or later they'll discover
his principal occupation:*

*Asking questions that escape, flapping their wings
like birds along the eaves of houses.*

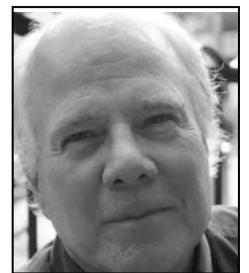
"Vesuvius," the title poem, is the perhaps most complex lyric in the collection. Far from concerning the colossal theme of destruction of the Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, as one might expect, the title refers to a rubbed drawing, and evokes the artist's reflections upon, among other things, cultural and social expectations, failures and disappointments in art and love. One feels in the reading that this is a poem to be puzzled out, until the final lines draw together its diverse elements into an appropriately volcanic revelation.

Hazelton's translation strikes me as not only exceptionally readable, but felicitous in rendering the diction, tone and lyricism of the original. I say this as a reader of Spanish and French who, looking across from the translations to the original, can decipher most of the Portuguese.

Tavares is clearly as preoccupied as any poet with mortality in its elegiac and absurd implications. But she is never morbid or moribund. The intricacy of her inventions and beauty of her poetic leaps save us from that. From "The Stain of Colour":

*We can move forward into the losses.
But when the days go too far, we stretch out into the shadows of sunset,
we're tracker gymnasts, the shadows are our pyjamas of elastic and smoke,
they carry us tautly towards the sun that's disappeared now into its stain of colour.
Our shadows are walking shadows on the road.
We are walkers with the shadows and run uselessly into the stain of colour.*

Brian Campbell a poet and songwriter, whose most recent book is *Shimmer Report* (Ekstasis Editions). He lives in Montreal.



Hugh Hazelton

VIA ROMA

Carmelo Militano

Mary Melfi's writing career goes all the way back to the mid-seventies with the publication of her first collection of poetry *The Dance, the Cage, and the Horse*, in 1976. It is a vast and varied writing career encompassing many genres: poetry, plays, memoir, and two novels *Infertility Rites* (1991) and most recently another novel, *Via Roma*. She is no doubt part of the multi-cultural canon in Canada or at the very least has a secure niche in Italo-Canadian letters.

Via Roma is a novel driven by the main character Sophie Wolfe and sets out to be philosophically wise, witty, and alternates between lustful lament (and celebration) tragic undertow, and finally a mediation on life vs the after-life.

Since this is a novel set in Montreal, the use of the last name Wolfe by Melfi quickly establishes an ironic tone as anyone with a basic knowledge of Canadian history would recognize. Then there is the choice of the name Sophie-the familiar of Sophia- which in Greek means wisdom. Her name almost neatly summarizes what this novel is all about or at least points us towards the journey Melfi is about to take us on. It is an exuberant ride full of saucy comments for example, on the joys of kissing and orgasm, the eternal joys of the marriage bed in the Eternal city Rome and the horrible loss Sophie feels at the unexpected death of her wonderful Italian-Canadian husband.

Dante Aglieri (another not so subtle reference) is the epitome of virtue, gentleness, and over-all a great lover. To the joy and surprise of Sophie, he loves to give her oral sex, he is smart, and grounded and not connected to the Montreal mafia. Or is he in fact 'connected'? What is the truth about his death in a mysterious car 'accident'?

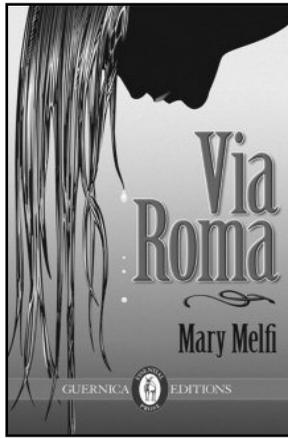
What is refreshing about this novel is Melfi's use of an Anglo character to talk about things Italian. In other words, Melfi uses an outsider to show or give us an insider (Italian) account. Sophie provides us with her tart observations about the Italian family she has married into, ethnic divisions and strains in Montreal, and her dodgy and complicated relationship with her media star mother, Sandra. She is also fixated on romantic love, physical love and how it leads to spiritual or divine love, and its connection to the divine in contrast to the base free-wheeling attitudes (and behavior) of her promiscuous mother. Sophie repeatedly makes arch remarks about her mother's sex life and career. You see Sophie is all virtue in contrast to her mother and if there is a failing in her character it is this one-dimensional note Melfi sounds over and over again about Sophie. Her husband is perfection personified, Sophie herself is a free-spirit and liberated and smart and cute in her saucy irreverent attitude towards everyone's dirty secret- sex; you see Anglos love sex with Italians and now alas he is gone.

On the other hand, Italians would call Sophie 'spiritoso', witty, and we are asked to see her as liberated and bold in her understanding of sexual relations between men and women and in her desire to defy convention and aspire towards and find a 'higher' love which she has been denied with the death of her husband.

The problem, however, is that although her philosophical reach is meant to show us how Sophie is literally searching for wisdom her philosophical rambles instead convey the feeling she is not as clever as she thinks she is and her ideas feel like pop psychology. Sophie's need to be philosophical gets in the way of her own story and inquiry about what happened to her husband.

Melfi wants *Via Roma* to be both a funny romantic romp and a deeply felt existential examination of love, sex, and marriage. It is written with a frothy style and has Sophie espouse ideas on God, life, death, Italy, sex, food, language- to name a few- and it is also a novel that wants to show us what a true lusty contemporary young woman thinks and feels.

Sophie is a seeker or on a quest to learn who killed her beloved husband and to find him in the after-life or alternative spirit world. Her guide is a Virgil like character who like in the original *Divine Comedy* takes Sophie on a kind of magical mystery tour in the after life (if you get that reference, you are showing like me, your age.). She urgently, desperately wants to find him, see him, and make love with him. Along the way there is much philosophical talk of one kind or another on, for example, the nature of the after life, the nature of spiritual or divine love or there are many travelogue- like



Via Roma
Mary Melfi
Guernica Editions
2015, 216 pages.
\$20.00, paper



Mary Melfi

Carmelo Militano is a poet and novelist. His latest work is *The Stone-Mason's Notebook* (Ekstasis Editions, 2016).

MORTALITY (continued from page 21)

further into the forest.

They also serve who (listen to the birds).

Always a lyricist, Rosenblatt has, in this time of academic retreat to formalism, responds to fashion with his own form, the Rosensonnet, little bird songs that celebrate the greening. His new paintings and poems break into the beautiful silence of trees as he hugs the trunks and looks up for the revelation in measures unique to every species.

These are, until the Rosenblattian interruption of lust, respectful poems. The voyeur is a song-catcher whose obligation is to record without changing the intention of nature to celebrate itself. Too much of that has happened already and Rosenblatt and his wife have fought hard for preservation of natural habitats on Vancouver Island.

The forest sings but, when the voyeur is overcome by his own hunger, the mask slips and he lusts as before, plotting to drag the Green Man's bride to some Photosynthesis Motel, where

*shamelessly I'd snatch a multitude of alabaster moons
to string a pearl necklace and tempt the green man's mistress.*

This is after all call and response, the poet's prerogative as he stumbles on beauty, even as he mourns its exploitation by others,

*As in a theatre when the lights dim, so fall the curtains of eternity.
"And where will it end," I said, "when they've eaten all the leaves?"*

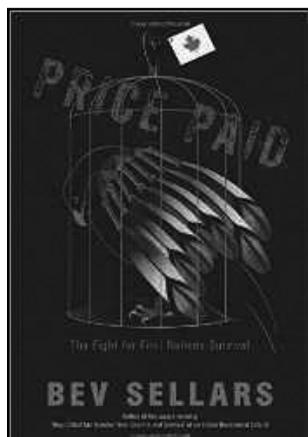
Iron Man and Green Man will duke it out after all in language invented for such rituals. The Birds continue to sing, the poet to saunter past multi-syllabic words and the Green Man, necrophile his alter ego, to reproduce with nurse logs, the Madonnas who in real life are whores.

Life goes on and Rosenblatt continues to invent his own realities, the baroque sounds, word-bejewelled liturgy of his Aristotelian belief system. His voice is unique and he dances it further and further into the firmament, "The spinner waltzes with his prey between this world and the next" realising he is talking to a complete stranger; that, he says, is poetry.

Linda Rogers' new novel *Bozuk* (Exile Editions) is the story of a broken Canadian who follows a spirit guide to the highest mountain in western Turkey.

THE TRUTH IS, WE ARE SHARING THIS LAND, NOW

Chuck Barker



Price Paid: The Fight for First Nations Survival
Bev Sellars
Talon, 2016
paper, 240 pages.

A professor, whom I respect, once joked that my education was funded by his tax dollars. As a Canadian, Aboriginal woman, I hear these kinds of misconceptions all the time, but, not as often from educated people. His comment, or witticism, perhaps, implied a few falsehoods: that I don't pay taxes, that taxes pay for my education, and that I didn't spend the first four years of my education working my ass off to pay for school. I pay the same taxes as everyone else, with the exception of one Walmart that is on a reserve. I would call the reserve "my ancestors' land," but, in reality, my ancestors once inhabited all of North America, and they were not averse to sharing the land with those who needed it.

This spring, Canadians will celebrate 150 years of confederation. But, our journey as an autonomous nation hasn't always been righteous. Our history is not as peaceful as we might think. We're not looking at one or two million deaths; we're looking at the devastating 67.5 to 106.4 million Aboriginal people throughout the Americas who died of the diseases brought over by European colonists and then the oppressive, violent acts of control that followed.

This history has been erased, forgotten, neglected and ignored. No more. Bev Sellars— residential school survivor, chief of Xat'sull, advisor to the British Columbia Treaty Commission, and award-winning author of *They Called Me Number One: Secrets and Survival at an Indian Residential School*—ensures that the orators of the past are heard, despite the best efforts from Ottawa through the Indian Act to silence them. In her latest book, *Price Paid: The Fight for First Nations Survival*, she tells Canada's history from a perspective that has rarely been used before: from the perspective of the people who call these lands their ancestral home.

The book begins with a foreword by the hereditary chief of the Kwawkwewlth, HemasKla-Lee-Lee-Kla, or, Chief Bill Wilson. Then Sellars informs readers of the many resources and aid the First Nations across the Americas contributed to European explorers.

In the 1400s, the land was populated with natives. Estimates of between 90 and 112.5 million Indigenous people lived here, nearly all of whom were ready to rescue the colonists who would otherwise have died. The plagues that diminished their population down to nearly five percent of pre-contact levels were only the beginning of their suffering. What followed was Confederation, where land was distributed to European settlers without consulting the people who lived on the land from the beginning; residential schools, where children were physically and sexually abused and removed of their culture and identity; and the Indian Act, which demonstrates its intolerance and ignorance in its very title: all are forms of control that were swiftly executed as soon as the opportunity – that is, the near extinction of the Aboriginals – presented itself. Sellars analyzes and reveals laws, amendments, and practices that almost erased Native Americans from history altogether.

But, the important aspect of the book is not that our home is gone. It has been ravaged, its occupants mistreated, but it is not gone. There still exists speakers, Sellars and Wilson among them, who can keep the memories and traditions alive, so long as Canadians are willing to listen. The resolve of native oppression is not an easy one, but Sellars has found hope. We must cast aside any idea of superiority over any other people group. The only way to do that is to educate each other and ourselves – to seek the truth. *Price Paid* is but one honest text. *The Called Me Number One* is another. And there must be more to come. This book is not a recommended read, it is a necessary read – especially for Canadians.

It is an accessible work. I wouldn't call it easy – I spent hours nauseated, distraught, and in tears while reading it, and I don't think it's just because of my personal connection to its content – but it is written with an easy-to-digest first person narrative. Unfortunately, this narrative is both a strength and a weakness. Readers will find many errors in punctuation. Were this a novel, I would ignore that and consider it, perhaps, an attempt at stream of consciousness. But, it is a text meant to console and

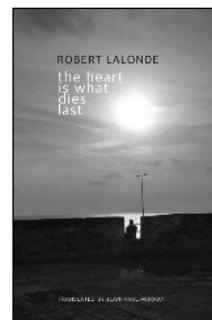
shed light on important historical events. Credibility is hard to maintain when a reader has to reread a sentence many times for clarity because of missing punctuation, or ambiguity over when a quote has concluded. That's an unfortunate distraction from the valuable information it encompasses.

In spite of this, most readers will feel reborn upon reading this book, so hidden is the truth of Canadian history. And it is so relevant, now, while we undergo the next phase of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – the commission that will shed light on the residential schools – and while Canadians enter their 150th year as a nation. Equipped with the truth, Canadians can finally honestly and comprehensively celebrate our country. With knowledge and understanding, we can learn to atone and repair what we have wrought. Let it be noted that Sellars does not primarily identify colonists as European, British, white, or invaders. She, along with any traditional First Nation of Canada, has a very specific word to describe those who are not of Aboriginal decent: newcomers. Most appropriate. After all, we are sharing this land, now.



Bev Sellars

Chuck Barker writes from the Sto:lo First Nation. Her last review in PRRB was of *Rose's Run* by Dawn Dumont.work



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THE BRINK OF FREEDOM

Linda Rogers

“Blessed are the meek,” the firebrand Messiah from Nazareth spoke in his alleged sermon on the mount, “for they shall inherit the Earth.” In those days, the Earth was a potentially wonderful legacy – people to meet, places to see, clean water and abundant renewable resources – and heaven an abstraction. The dispossessed had reason to hope, to cross borders in their search for new and better worlds.

Now they might be excused for turning their faces skyward, to the new nuisance grounds, where the chariots of the gods orbit in space because the earth is a place as dirty and overcrowded as the Roma and refugee camps that fester on the skin of Europe.

Still, in a post global world depleted and impoverished by oligarchs, there are many who continue to hope that a better life is possible on some other shore. That better life is no longer only guaranteed freedom from hunger and oppression, but desperate escape from genocide, and the results of global warming, crop failure and brutal civil war. They are the brave who risk their lives on overcrowded boats, at armed borders and in filthy refugee camps, and encounter the reality of the dream, sometimes the face of kindness but more often bigotry and more violence.

“You know we will never be accepted here (Vijay) said. “They will always look at the colour of our skin and treat us differently.”

The brink is a loaded noun. It means the possible and the impossible, the river to cross and the end of the world. The disenfranchised are taking that risk as ancestral earth is scorched and they must flee, for the sake of their children, to a future that is unknown to any of us.

Sadly, in times of uncertainty, the uncertain react with fear and the principles of inclusivity that are fundamental to most ancient belief systems fail. Greece, the once glorious epicentre of Mediterranean prosperity and now the face of Ozymandian melancholy, is the place where a collision of civilisations is happening and the setting for this very ambitious novel.

Weaving the stories of an Indian Dalit, Roma refugees, and a dysfunctional Canadian do-gooder with the fate of a small boy, who cannot survive this collision intact despite his intellectual gifts and the love he is given, is an enormous undertaking. Harvey, whose own roots are Mediterranean, brings considerable experience and insight to this moment in history, where the ancient and modern worlds share the same brink, a crack that lets in the light or presents a deadly chasm.

Greece, at the epi-centre of an old world economy where hospitality was the Golden Rule, is where migrating populations from the Middle East and South Asia are beginning their migration to promised lands: England, Germany, Scandinavia and America. Many are welcomers with food, blankets and shelter on offer, but strange politics erupt from the barren soil of economic depression, the new reality in Greece. Visitors are no longer as welcome as their hero Odysseus was when he washed up on foreign beaches. Tourists, who bring money, are resented, and refugees, who bring equal measures of hope and hunger, are persecuted by an underclass that has no room to share.

The writer is called to witness the diaspora, to view it objectively and channel difficult stories and the potential for hope and redemption. Harvey takes this responsibility seriously.

Her compassionate engineer/police officer with a bleeding heart, Christos, his name no mistake, explains his view of the situation:

“You know papers exaggerate,” he said. “Not every policeman is a member of the Golden Dawn, not do we look the other way when someone is beating up a foreigner.” He’d jailed three young Greek racists just a few days ago, kids who could easily be his own, for beating an elderly gypsy woman.”

It is the young who resist, whether it is confronting social norms in positive and



The Brink of Freedom
Stella Leventoyannis
Harvey
Signature Editions,
2015



Stella Harvey

negative ways, and the young who set out to start over, even though that investment in hope has diminishing returns in an over-crowded world.

“Kids were committing such disgraceful acts there days, carving a swastika on a young Pakistani boy’s face, setting fire to Chinese owned One euro stores, Kicking Roma children who begged on the street. Such senseless violence would once have brought so much shame on a family...”

Remembering Penelope’s weaving, it is a challenge to bring the threads together and weave a happy ending. Somehow Penelope managed to will her heroic husband home. Harvey’s tapestry has many aspects, woven by tragedy, but also illuminated by the gold threads of redemption shining in decent responses to need.

She keeps it together and the book, despite its insistent polemic under painting, tells an engaging story, adhering as much as she can in a narrative with so much necessary exposition, “show don’t tell.” There is so much to tell, and because this is a novel and not an editorial, actions speak.

The Brink of Freedom is about all of us, how we go with or against our better natures in responding to the calls for help that are coming from everywhere, from refugees, from our streets and prisons, our urban ghettos and restless suburbs. How we resolve it may determine whether or not the human race survives, because, as President Obama reiterated in his last State of the Union address, *ubuntu*, together, accommodating one another’s strengths and weaknesses, we are strong, and will, all of us together, hope to “find safe passage and a welcoming world at journey’s end,” the portal that welcomes us into the world and sees us out.

Linda Rogers’ new novel, *Bozuk (Exile Editions)* is also about tremours, in Turkey, where Europe meets Asia.

GARAGE CRITICISMS (continued from page 14)



because that soul has sought us out.” A few paragraphs later he proposes, “nothing is quite as agonizing as exposing your soul with all its strengths and weaknesses, virtues and vanities, and nothing is quite as joyful as someone who displays their soul for you.”

Using personal anecdotes and family sub-themes to establish and bolster his essays, Babiak’s intimate histories grow progressively more potent. Somewhere, a transition takes place and the garage critic is replaced by the father, lover, the middle-aged man searching for some meaning in a silly world. The wisdom of this book doesn’t come from its dismantling of vacuous modern culture, but from its

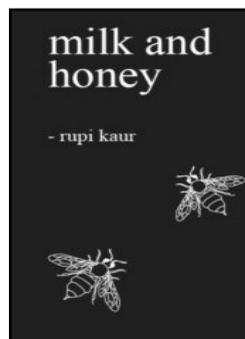
subtle examination of fatherhood, the follies of man, the inevitable fray of husbandry and the tribulation of losing the ones you love. These are messages that be left nearly unsaid, unseen, but like stars resting beneath a sunrise, achingly they remain long after the book is closed.

Writer and photographer, Bradley Peters spent several years travelling South America and Southeast Asia. He currently writes for The Cascade.

THE COLLECTION EVERYONE TALKS ABOUT

Jessica Milliken

Rupi Kaur holds nothing back in her debut collection of poetry, *Milk and Honey*. Secrets spill out of the pages; I almost want to keep the book shut in case one slips out. Like many young writers, Kaur had been told there was no market for her poetry and she was better off submitting a piece or two to anthologies and literary magazines. We can thank the universe she didn't listen. At 21, the Toronto-based writer and artist self-published this collection using Amazon's *Createspace*. Despite there being no market for a young-Canadian-woman-of-colour's poetry, the book began topping North American best-seller lists. The power of social media platforms like Instagram and Tumblr, allowed Kaur's collection to reach across countries and readers of all backgrounds. Readers wanted her work. Her secrets matched ours. Within five months of its self-publication, McMeel Publishing from the U.S. contacted Kaur and wanted to re-release the book under their imprint. It's now a *New York Times* Bestseller.



Milk and Honey
Rupi Kaur
Andrews McMeel
Publishing, 2016
Paper, 208 pages

Milk and Honey is broken into four sections; the hurting, the loving, the breaking, and the healing. Each section deals with a different type of pain but her themes of femininity, abuse, love, sex, lust, and loss are fluent throughout the book. Filling in white spaces are her own line drawings that complement and illustrate the poetry. These include outlines of bodies and body parts, a woman's face with a hand over top of her mouth, a bottle of alcohol spilling on a floor, a snakeskin, a sunset, a pair of lightbulbs, and many other sketches. They add weight to the poetry and make it visually appealing, unique to Kaur.

Everything in *Milk and Honey* is written as poetry: the back cover, the dedication, the thank-you to the reader, even the about-the-writer reads as poetry. Everything is important and everything is treated with the same respect. The book, and even her website, use only lowercase letters. Kaur explains:

although i can read and understand my mother tongue (punjabi) i do not have the skillset to write poetry in it. to write punjabi means to use gurmukhi script. and within this script there are no uppercase or lowercase letters. all letters are treated the same. i enjoy how simple that is. how symmetrical and how absolutely straightforward. i also feel there is a level of equality this visuality brings to the work. a visual representation of what i want to see more of within the world: equalness.

How exquisite that everything is treated the same, especially when placed inside poetry where feelings, emotions, characters and the speaker are not.

Within the theme of abuse are epigrams such as “*the rape will / tear you / in half, / but it / will not / end you*” and “*you have sadness / living in places / sadness shouldn't live*”. With their shortness and directness, these pieces speak directly to any survivor of assault both as an understanding and as a statement of hope—“it will not end you.” Kaur also writes of a strained father-daughter relationship that the narrator compares to the “collateral damage” of her alcoholic parents' marriage. This relationship continues in pieces where Kaur writes how alcoholic parents don't exist, they simply “... *could not stay sober / long enough to raise their kids*”. Kaur shies away from nothing, sharing these secrets and others and almost inviting the reader into a therapy session.

For love, she talks of the good and the bad. She speaks directly to a heartbroken reader like a best friend, saying exactly what they need to hear, giving them the strength to continue after love has ended.

*When you are broken
and he has left you
do not question
whether you were
enough
the problem was
you were so enough
he was not able to carry it*

In the final section of the book, *the healing*, Kaur leaves advice and courage for readers in epigrams like “*accept yourself / as you were designed*.” She is a writer that embraces herself, “flaws” and all and encourages her readers to do the same. Kaur and her words are support for readers, as evident in this poem:

*you look at me and cry
everything hurts
i look at you and whisper
but everything can heal*



Rupi Kaur (photo: Baljit)

Kaur was able to begin healing herself through the process of this book, as she writes in the introduction, “*my heart woke me crying last night / how can i help i begged / my heart said / write the book*.” But this book can also help other women heal.

This book hurts to read, yet it's pain you want to feel. Or maybe, it's pain you need to feel—exquisite pain, drenched in honesty, bravery. “*the abused / and the / abuser*” she says; “*i have been both*.” I want to slip this book into the purse of the girl at work who thinks she needs to hide in the office because she didn't have time to put make-up on today and now is no longer pretty. I want to throw it at a best friend who had a boy take so much from her she thought she was empty. I want Rupi Kaur to come and read this book out loud to all the women I love, the men too.

But what if no one else shivers when they read “*he only whispers i love you / as he slips his hands / down the waistband / of your pants*.” What if no one else's heart falters when she tells them “*people go / but how / they left / always stay*.” What if no one else wants to stand on the top of the world with a megaphone and scream “*i am a museum full of art / but you had your eyes shut*.” I want to keep it for myself. I want to hide this book on my shelf and let the dust find it. I want to keep this secret, keep her words for me. I wonder if there's a way to do both.

Jessica Milliken writes from B.C.'s Fraser Valley where studies English, Creative Writing and Theatre. She and is working on a first, major poetry manuscript.

OLSON (continued from page 16)

of a sort of spiritual contact high with forebears and idols.

Mr. Lopate's phrase, “glorious thought excursions,” seems like the perfect description of much of Olson's output. Fans of his prose poetry will find moments replete with the reeling riffs of surrealistic, hallucinatory lyricism familiar from his books such as *Oxbow Kazoo*, *Echo Regime*, *Logo Lagoon* and *Eggs & Mirrors* in the pages of *In Advance of the Broken Justy*. Preparations for the sale of their 500 square foot condo and a move away from their infuriatingly noisy building (preparations for naught, as it turns out, for neither sale nor move ever transpire within the pages of the novel) instigates a stream of thoughts on the nature of reality leading eventually to the following passage:

When consciousness meets reality the result is milk. Traffic lights blossom into prayer wheels. Laundry folds itself into armies of tide pool angst and marches around like generalities of floral chambray. Rain falls up instead of down. The acceptance of frogs liberates bubbles of pulp. Time sags with basement ping pong tournaments. Garrets ovulate glass bagatelles. Realism percolates prizefight sweat. Details sparkle like crawling kingsnakes in the mouth of a Mississippi attorney.

In Advance of the Broken Justy is a thoughtful, grown-up novel for the sort of thoughtful, grown-up readers who seek out real bookstores and is not likely to have much appeal to fans of those trashy, escapist titles found in the sad, little book and magazine shops in airports Olson derides.

Steve Potter's poems and stories have appeared in numerous print and online journals such as: Able Muse, Blazevox, Drunken Boat, Knock, Marginalia, Rune and 3rd Bed. He lives in Seattle.

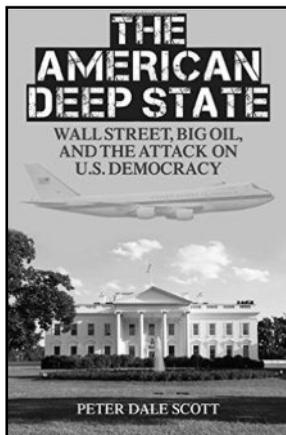
ON THE AMERICAN DEEP STATE

James Reid

According to the American poet Robert Hass, Peter Dale Scott's *Coming to Jakarta* was "the most important political poem to appear in the English language in a very long time." *Coming to Jakarta* was one of Scott's six collections of poetry, a body of work that led to Scott receiving one of the highest honours in the United States for poetry, the Lannan Award. Scott has also published a dozen books of political history that reflect and extend the concerns of his renowned poetry.

The American Deep State: Wall Street, Big Oil, and the Attack on American Democracy is both a summation of new research, and an overview of his political work that references and leads back to the long threads of the necessary history in his earlier political books. Four of these key works are: *Deep Politics and the Death of JFK*, *The Iran-Contra Connection*, *The Road to 9/11*, and *American War Machine*. Each of these significant books is referenced, while current information in *The American Deep State* updates them significantly. The first 182 pages of *American Deep State* consolidate new material and extend the key concerns of his previous books. The concluding 149 pages contain detailed notes and a Bibliography, both of which provide welcome references for readers who are familiar with, or new to Scott's measured and deeply moral political writing.

Peter Dale Scott is a former Canadian diplomat and English Professor at the University of California, Berkeley. The son of noted Canadian poet and constitutional lawyer F.R. Scott and painter Marian Dale Scott, who was born in Montreal, Canada on January 11th, 1929, has attracted a lot of attention throughout the years for his transparent and heavily-footnoted political writings. Peter Dale Scott is a former Canadian diplomat and English Professor at the University of California, Berkeley. The son of noted Canadian poet and constitutional lawyer F.R. Scott and painter Marian Dale Scott, who was born in Montreal, Canada on January 11th, 1929, has attracted a lot of attention throughout the years for his transparent and heavily-footnoted political writings



The American Deep State: Wall Street, Big Oil, and the Attack on U.S. Democracy
Peter Dale Scott
Rowman & Littlefield
2016
hardcover, 356pages.



Liberty

The American Deep State is not a book that examines the recent consensus political history that has been presented widely. For example, it does not cover the barefaced lying, incompetence, corruption, and genocide in Iraq under the Bush Cheney administration, which provided endless coverage for trustworthy reporters, and for informed cartoonists from Toles to Garry Trudeau's *Dooniesbury*. Instead, *The American Deep State* examines the lesser known relationships of concealed power, that often underlie public actions that, although public, are often difficult or impossible to understand without deeper background information.

Let's ignore all the colourful, off the wall, and impossible 9/11 conspiracy theories that populate the dark corners of some American psyches, and also lurk in the concluding chapters of Thomas Pynchon's recent *Bleeding Edge*. Instead, let us ask

ourselves why major questions about the period before, during and after 9/11 remain unanswered. Why is America today still under a "thirteen-year national emergency" under the protocols of Continuity of Government (COG) implemented on 9/11? (p.9). Why has Dick Cheney not revealed what he was doing and where he was during the immediate US government response to 9/11? Why did Cheney refuse to answer these questions when asked by the 9/11 Commission? (*The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*).

These questions are similar to the type of questions Scott asks about the activities of the American Deep State. Scott is not interested in speculative conspiracy theories. He is a former Canadian diplomat, a renowned scholar, and retired Professor Emeritus at the University of California Berkeley. His approach is grounded in a trustworthy and scholarly examination of what is known about particular activities of the American deep state. These examinations usually lead to questions and further examination. Where questions cannot be answered clearly, he says so.

The American Deep State is another closely argued *summa historia* by Scott. It is a beacon of 20th century political history that extends and connects the threads of history in his previous examinations of political history. *American Deep State* integrates information from his previous histories, such as *American War Machine*, *The Road to 9/11*, *The Iran Contra Connection*, *Cocaine Politics*, and *Deep Politics and the Death of JFK*. In the future, Scott's deep research will lead historians of our time back to a more complete history of 20th and early 21st century events.

The future history of our time will be founded on and strengthened by Scott's scholarly exactitude, and by the numerous contemporary historians he cites. Of the dozens of citations, there are several trustworthy researchers whose work I have read, and whom he often references:

Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*

Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2010*

Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA*

Jane Mayer, *The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned Into a War on American Ideals*

Glenn Greenwald, *No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U.S. Surveillance State*

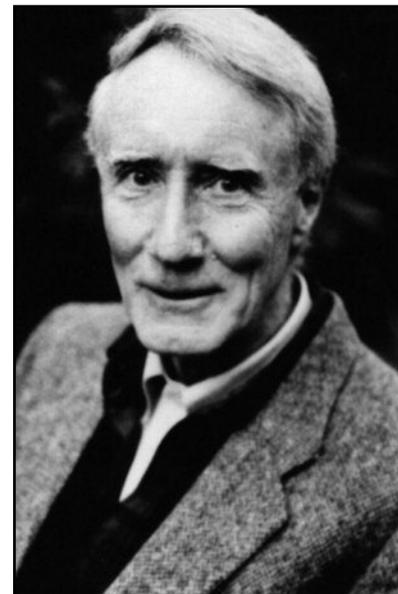
James Risen, *State of War: The Secret History of the CIA and the Bush Administration*

Jeremy Scahill, *Dirty Wars: The World is a Battlefield*.

Contemporary historians of ancient Greece often turn to beacons from the past, to assist them with their continuing illumination of the past. These scholars often turn to works such as *The Histories* of Herodotus, and *The Peloponnesian War* by Thucydides. Future historians who care to excavate the political history of our past will certainly turn to histories such as *The American Deep State: Wall Street, Big Oil, and the Attack on U.S. Democracy* by Peter Dale Scott. And in Scott's work, they will find beacons to illuminate the darkness of our time.

Co-editors Bryan Sentes and James Edward Reid recently published an interview with Peter Dale Scott: "On Translation: An Interview with Peter Dale Scott." *Paideuma: Modern and Contemporary Poetry and Poetics* 2016, Volume 42: pp. 371-387. University of Maine, Orono, Maine USA.

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



Peter Dale Scott

MARLENE DIETRICH'S EYES

Josie Di Sciascio-Andrews

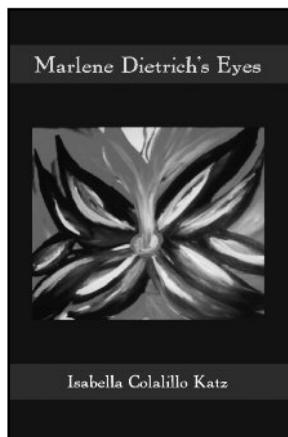
A child's wide eyed beauty transforms into a woman's gaze brimming with wonder. Innocence and artistic sensibility, tempered by life and the myriad waves of experience, chisel away at the superfluous skin of the soul, revealing the goddess: *Inanna, Tara, Cassandra, Mary, Pythia, Astarte, Lupa, witchy Gala, Magistra, Lamia, Eve, Marlene Dietrich.*

Poetry is language in orbit, wrote Seamus Heaney. Word upon word emerging in segments of blank space. A poet's interplanetary imagination and memory etch life's journey from birth through time, projecting dreams into the eternal. From the *balcony of an ancestral home* to the streets of Toronto, history and the circular meanderings of the self are interwoven with myth and the sonority of language. These are poems of reflection of things past, as well as contemplations of the present moment rife with possibility. Bound in the timeless metaphor and glamour of Marlene Dietrich's eyes, this collection gathers within its pages, as in the cartography of a woman's days, *glissands of truth and an ageless seeing*. The writing accrues from

beginning to end forming an atemporal, holographic image of the feminine. Iconic *blue eyes* glance at us, as *she sits on a bed of sunlight*, ageless in a corner of the universe. A woman alone in time-space, cinematic, *a star among human stars*, like the goddesses she embodies, *breathing in the beauty of eternity*. The allegory of the quintessential feminine archetype takes shape within the perimeters of the poet's own geographies, her biographical self, tethered to the people and places her heart houses. In sequence, the poems embrace the passage through time with its inherent beauty and pain of love and motherhood, encompassing the dissonance of *history's dark clouds*, where *anger and hate become slogan*. Marlene Dietrich's eyes *see clearly the tainted heart of her people*. Strength and determination in the face of adversity are her power. Silence in view of wrongdoing can be no option for one with the spirit of Diana. The sceptre of wisdom was always in Nimue's pale hands, though kings and wizards claimed it as their own. Intercessor to the divine, she was *a woman who fought back, who never gave up, and who was never silent*.

Our becoming arranges itself as flight. Through the redemptive power of imagination, we take wings and we *sail on arrows of human time*. For the poet as well as the reader *there are questions, moments, feelings, thoughts*, where we are at times *churning reality* and at times *sailing through it, while yet at others ruminating*. After all of our rational calculations however, we return to the magical stillness of our own centre, *poised like trees strengthened by windstorms*, our essence *distilled in a cartography of flesh and bone, a sublime gift*. From birth we entered *earthplane through a door of light*, yet our *first memories taste of blood*. From the metaphysical to the physical, the language of poetry treads in the realm of the ethereal membrane between the spiritual and the corporeal. *Love sutures form to fire* – from light to matter our body manifests into *a new conception, another journey into unforgiving time*. Spirit pours through the light into the new receptacle of the body, *blood made flesh*. These poems move in succession through the pivotal moments of a woman's life, she who is *a hieratic spark, a holy birther of holies*, endowed with the gift of words, *a sybil mouth*. At the entrance of Plato's cave, we unearth a being who has reclaimed the validity of the self away from all the surrounding, fragmenting sources. Through the act of writing, the poet stands firm, becomes an oracle. *A woman never surrenders though child and lover*, and I may add society, *shatter her solitude. She remembers dialogues with her original self, when gorgeous comets trailed from her eyes*. It is here, when the poet is alone with her muse that she *gathers hoards of stars and the night into her body*, as *mountain mists descend like breath across the vast solitude of the valley, longing for what her heart knew and had forgotten*.

This beautiful compilation of poems stitches *moments woven from silence*, remembrances of mother, father, friends, *roads that go into the world* and always bring the poet back to *memories of places and people* now changed or erased. The garden and the *fragrant, thick-lipped roses* are now left untended. The landscape has reclaimed people and blooms. *There's little left of the old world* the poet writes of her native Biferno upon revisiting it in middle age. *The only thing ever present is the river flowing silver and silent as ever*. The arrow of time tramples on our human smallness, makes dust of our assumptions. Consolation to our finitude can only be the belief in the immortality of our connection to the intangible wellspring of all being. We can rest assured in the knowing



Marlene Dietrich's Eyes
Isabella Colalillo Katz
Ekstasis Editions
2014, \$23.95

that *we are the living skein of First Source*. In *Evolutionary Angel*, we move through our lives as *the wandering limbs of time portals*. We are *the tonal alchemy of his hands*, creatures of the *new learning of his cosmic eyes*.

The roses, the children and all the loved ones time has smudged out of the picture, can be reclaimed by encapsulating them in words. The self remains stable through the act of writing. Poetry, the great synthesizer of life's disparate and often irreconcilable experiences redeems, through the alchemy of art, all that is broken, doomed otherwise to death and decay. Though *the lines in my face deepen like spider webs*, we read, they are *messengers that report the existence of the invisible and catalogue quantifiable journeys*. The personal, as well as the historical events that carve their initials on the skin of our lives, are no match for the power of myth-making and poetics. *Though the greedy and the war mongers are unrelenting and shaming*, and while they ask us *to consume bread and people* because *they have armies to secure order through destruction*, poetry leads us back to safety, to *a place for words to drop their load of pain*. I want to love this pen and this page that listens, writes the poet in *I wanna love the night*. I want to love *these poems that trickle down my throat like cups of black tea, neurotic as the morning, waiting for hope and moonlight*. The poetic eye sees right through *the dissonant rhetoric spouting war narratives for the transcendental ignorance of the serpent sons of darkness*. It is a discerning eye reclaiming the essence through the chaff of every epoch's charlatans *dealing out death on the high altars of electric Babylon*. History will continue to be peopled with merciless tyranny, but alongside the horrors proliferated by the lower natures of ego and greed, life will continue to offer the gifts of life, family, love, beauty and art. Swaddled in imagination, glamorous and timeless, the goddess calls us back to the Yeat's falconer, away from chaos and darkness. Slouching towards us on a quilt of light, she beckons us back to truth with her smokey eyes. She is our lover and our mother, our muse. *I'm here*. She reassures us. *I'm coming. I'll find you*. At times vulnerable and human like the rest of us, Cassandra contemplates death in the throes of her despair. *I can't hold my life*, she sings, and yet this *queen of thorns* searching for her *bardo ticket* guides us like Virgil, through the infernal paths of brokenness into the light of spiritual wholeness. *I can't hold your words*, invokes the poet as if they were fiery coals hot from the forge of creation. This is indeed poetry of the soul where the words themselves are steppingstones for the alchemical quest.

With her polished pebbles, Isabella Colalillo Kates leads us into the metaphysical labyrinth of the self. There, inside the well of the heart, everything converges: mother, father, childhood, friends, loves, homes, joy, pain, history, landscapes, time, the universe. *My heart is a place to know your wonder, to remember and imagine the spark and photon of your air and fire*. The poet walks *between the lines, through old thoughts and fresh tears, past sips of doubt, deeper into the timeless*.

Isabella Colalillo Katz is a terrific contemporary poet. Her gifts are her words gathering everyday moments into poetic images and meditative ponderings of the sublime. Through the lens of Marlene Dietrich's archetype, these well crafted poems lead us through the difficult journey of the experiential through to the healing power of myth-making. In the end, we are ourselves left feeling wizened by everything we have read. Through crystal cut, engaging language we are led into the gentle, yet riveting eyes of a woman's heart. This labyrinth of thorns and winding paths into the self is the ultimate essence of source and of all knowing. The poem taps the poet on the shoulder and reminds her that *life is the soul's need for love. That love is the conscious measure, the quantifiable grammar of our metaphysical longings, its holy geometry scrawling real time images into bony words*. Ultimately, I believe we are invited to *croon and remember* our own lives with our own eyes, *moist and half-lidded, to dream within the dream of starlight, of twinkling villages and the snowy glitter of the cities we now inhabit, to forge our own poetic Nachtgedanke*.

Josie Di Sciascio-Andrews is the author of four books of poetry. She lives and writes in Oakville, Ontario.



Isabella Colalillo Katz

A POET NEVER BREAKS, A POET BREAKS FREE ON PAYING FOR THE WORLD'S MOST EXPENSIVE DRUG WITH A POEM

Howard Breen

"...my body sheds virus like the forest sheds dead limbs in a storm,"

While there is a lot of excellent must-read Canadian literature, there is little known for being simultaneously written while commanding a deeply personal conquest over a lifelong enemy.

The award-winning poet and author Kim Goldberg can always be counted on by her readers to be entertained by a literary surprise or two. But none would have guessed that her seventh book was a Faustian-bartered 84 day deal with a corporate interest she would normally rail against to fortuitously end a half century of hepalogic torment – for freedom.

To her credit, this uber-contemporary poet imparts boundless contemporary relevance to the struggle of millions battling the blood-borne viral affliction Hepatitis C, offering them unbridled hope for a cure whilst masterfully deploying and introducing us to the literary form known as *haibun*, best exemplified by Goldberg's reverence for the work of Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō. Without map or compass, but diarizing in alternating prose-cum-haiku-verse, Goldberg traverses between her physical and psychic journey over a three month clinical trial for a new drug (Harvoni with sticker-shock of \$1,200 a pill per day), yet never descending into the maudlin or didactic in spite of the gravitational pull of her reality which has been fraught in a cirrhotic orbit.

To the contrary, she enlivens and breadcrumbs her liver disease ordeal for us to follow with the edginess of war correspondent reportage, interspersed with grounded Jungian wellness-holism, or peppered with the focussed eye of an ornithologist or other trained observer, repeatedly end-spiked with a poignantly packed haiku but always infused with the voice of the brazen boomer *hepper* warrior inciting insurgence both political and literary.

*every word
a seed seeking
soft earth*

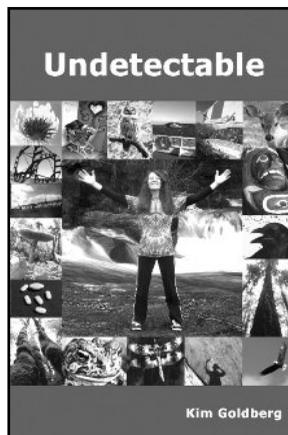
In turns, Goldberg is our gifted spirit guide as her travels take us on innumerable pleasantly unexpected excursions which include stops in places like Tangiers, wishing to drown a soothsayer in the Kasbah, to laments for long gone humpbacks haunting a Salish Sea lagoon site of a former whaling station to witnessing a lynching by Governor James Douglas of a pair of indigenous men to equally insightful reflections on an Earth doppelganger known as Kepler 452-b.

Unpacked, *Undetectable* is a unique interactive mix of mind-body-meld narrative and haiku, evocatively posted like interpretative park signage with pill bottle life and limb instructions glued on. Together, Goldberg richly inherits the élan vital of Bashō. Each *day page* entry takes imaginative flight in the most stunning and vulnerably colourful manner akin to the plumage of bufflehead, guillemot, kingfisher, grebe and towhee, 'cannonballs on wings,' that are among the poet's most favoured companions, as she cautiously yet fastidiously hikes off and records her daily 'pounding rush of cellular evacuation.'

Though there are many wistful moments, murky and dangerous youthful needlestick settings, heartfelt cries, starkly candid familial and other sharings from the deepest recesses, and the body's ever-present pharmaceutical home invasion of hemolytic contraindications are what sear the scopophilic read, yet Goldberg never breaks — but rather breaks free.

Like a gripping live thriller-drama that dares to both provoke and entertain *Undetectable* seesaws and oscillates through the yo-yo-yin-yang of game-changing cathartic life moments. As consensual peeping voyeurs we experience the pharmaphobic Goldberg experience her moment of transmission, decades of illness secrecy, and finally her cure, rebirth and incarnation as poet-survivor.

Both poet and the reader muse: *What role did the affliction ultimately play on*



Undetectable
Kim Goldberg
Pig Squash Press
\$19.00

being alone, single, child-free, solitary and self-employed?

*what happens
to a tapestry when you remove
the weft?*

The answer is clear: once tested, detected, treated and if lucky to be cured by the miracle drug, the chains are removed, and one can again be exclusively co-infected with life's limitless wonders.

While most can't use poetry to heal, Goldberg demonstrates that by thoughtfully shedding a debilitating curse, and finally 'purging the drug that purged the virus' we are not small and we are not powerless to create. We can re-create ourselves, find all that is undetectable, lost, or unseen along the way, and relish the palpability of our ability to chelate, create and free ourselves.

Goldberg should be on everyone's short-list for accomplished iconic poetry honouring the best ambrosially vulnerable self-portraits in prose-metric verse. What makes her book-length poem particularly compelling is how it unintentionally makes a persuasively weighty case for expanding the poet-in-residence program from legislatures, town libraries and schools to hospitals, 'To all those still waiting,' as Goldberg so generously dedicates the *Undetectable*.

Pharmaceutical economics be damned, let's pray *Undetectable* becomes the shareholder gateway drug for demanding 'curing the incurable,' uncoupling corporate profits from conscience for the estimated 170 million still suffering, and the 1.4 million preventable deaths annually that might have been cured by Harvoni.

In the meantime, let's celebrate Kim Goldberg's personal cure, her colossal gift to us, and break out the champagne.

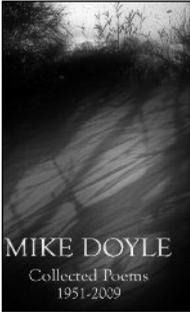
Howard Breen is an environmental and social justice activist-writer living in Victoria, British Columbia.



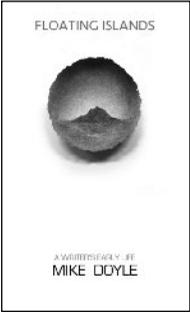
Kim Goldberg



**In Loving Memory of
Mike Doyle (1937- 2016),
Poet and Friend of
The PRRB**



*Collected Poems
1951 - 2009*
Ekstasis Editions



*Floating Islands:
A Writer's Early Life*
Ekstasis Editions

EMPTY BOWL REDUX

Michael Daley

Text of a talk given to Jefferson County Historical Society, Port Townsend, WA, on October 7, 2016, for their History of Small Press Publishers in Port Townsend Exhibit.

In the winter of 2000, Jack Estes of Pleasure Boat Studio and Charles Potts of *The Temple*, a magazine in Walla Walla, asked for a written history of Empty Bowl press. I spent that winter working on an essay giving the publishing history of most of the books I had anything to do with while I was part of Empty Bowl, from 1975 to around 1985. It's a more objective history than what you'll hear tonight. Tonight I'm more interested in talking about Empty Bowl as the focus of a history of ideas, and a collection of people who just happened to run into one another at a time in their lives when a similar passion for writing and art happened to be guiding them all, enough that they were moved to collaborate in editing, book design, fundraising, and distribution. It was that random, that all of us who worked together off and on for over a decade, found we could make books to capture those ideas and those passions. The late Robert Gordon who lived in Port Townsend during that period and who published in at least one of *The Dalmo'ma* anthologies, after he read that essay told me I made Empty Bowl sound like the most famous publishing house nobody ever heard of.

But I recommend it to you, for the "fun facts" and for some stories about the press. It's in my book, *Way Out There*—which I have here—and will happily sell to you—but the essay, "Running on Empty," is also online at the Pleasure Boat Studio website.

Tonight, I want to begin by saying a few words about a poem by Robert Sund, even though Robert didn't publish with Empty Bowl until our third issue of *Dalmo'ma*. Robert was a strong influence and supporter of the work we were doing right from the very beginning in 1976. He had a lot of praise for the hand-made quality of the first issue of *Dalmo'ma*, and its advocacy for "place" in the wilderness and rural orientation of the poems we published. Empty Bowl also shared his care for indigenous myths and poems related to Northwest tribes, as well as his interest in writing about physical labor, not so much working to earn a paycheck as the love of craft and care in making real things, as well as poems.

But—I've often been impressed and frankly puzzled to the point of being disturbed by the ending of Robert's poem "Spring in Ish River." Here's the poem:

*I can hear the two robins
crying from an alder across the creek.
Above me, in the vine maple, I see the nest.
I reach up and feel the four eggs lying lightly
among soft feathers.
I lift one egg out, lower my arm,
slowly, and
stand still.
Appalled, I see
the true shape of my hand.*

That last line might have passed me by without my noticing it but for that word "appalled." A word that connotes something bordering on disgust, even horror. And how can just *one* of the near limitless shapes a hand can get itself into be "true"?

The poem gets to its inescapable judgement by seeing many things at once. This shock and horror is the epiphany at an understanding of man's place on earth, our 'state of nature.' What the hand is doing here, for instance, has almost nothing whatsoever to do with Sund's frequent descriptions of work taking place, especially in his book *Bunch Grass*, and is almost the opposite, it would seem, from the judgement William Carlos Williams made in his poem, "The Red Wheelbarrow": "So much depends." But we're not in farm country in this poem, we're in the Sacred Grove. We're in that other part of literature the Pastoral tradition has kept alive since singing began. It's both what we've lost and what's left. That hand is our hand, the hand of the invader, the aggressor, the colonizer's hand and at the same time the devotee's hand, the admirer's, the lover's. The shape of the hand is the shape of the Poet's receptivity against the robin's egg blue cupped there, the realization in holding nature, or experiencing its passing, he or she can't separate from the real world. You can't take hold of a still warm robin's egg and step back.

Here's Robert's poem from *The Dalmo'ma Anthology*, another bird "Poem to the Parrot from Africa,"

*Sultry this afternoon in Seattle, hot
Cloudless days, not used to it—
Downtown the businessmen's gills are beating
Everywhere the businessmen's gills are beating—
They try to hide it in the bravado of ice cubes and gin
But you go back and forth on your limb
your feet clutching*

*like an old lady's hands
you are beautiful
cool blue soft grey feathers
breast stippled
your beak is a blue stone
drying in river sand...
Around your ryes, like a mask,
Tiny white feathers flow together
perfect as lace.*

*Your eyes are
black iris
in yellow opal,
They look not real—
only the dusty blue eyelid (silk fringes
no hand will weave)
moves, giving away your life.
Be careful!*

*You are the Negro.
You are roast beef with
red tailfeathers
You are the chicken no one will eat,
You breathe air dead with puritan goodness
You were given—from parents traveling in Africa—as a present—
They paid postage
You endured the airplane, and the freight car
and the bus, and now
the cars that go by on Newton Street
Last week there were two of you.
Overnight at the Vet's, too late, your friend
died, and went up in smoke over
Ballard.*

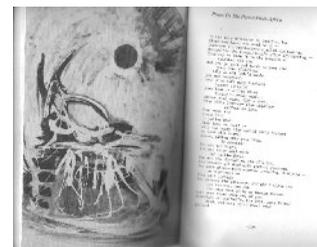
II

*When I look at our feet again
I see they are roots covered with snakeskin
And up through your throat, from your breast comes
a sound like dry crumpling paper,
And then
you sneeze—
a soft babylike sneeze~!==and I am
lost in your feathers
I am the father who cannot
reach for his children.*

III

*Today you're in the house next door,
in the hallway—
The house you came from is being fumigated.
Beside a vase of daisies and a poem of lost love,
you say something, voice
creaky
like a car window*

*Watch out!
There are men here who would make
dice out of your eyes,
They would*



white culture. Empty Bowl took native people and their stories, legends and myths as models for the kind of attitudes we wanted to foster through our own work, while at the same time encouraging ourselves to help preserve those cultures that now we see flourishing in new ways around the country. It was a small aspect of a process called “rehabitation.” And now in the same way many of us support those tribes who show up at Standing Rock in North Dakota and are called Protectors or we might applaud movements in several states that are trying to institute Indigenous People’s Day. From the first *Dalmo’ma* to the last we included and evolved with indigenous literature and attitudes just as we have incorporated the influence of Chinese poetry and Zen texts brought to us by Mike O’Connor and by Red Pine’s translations, as we looked for order, ritual, and value in protecting place through collaborative cultures.

Besides the influence and encouragement of writers like Gary Snyder and Robert Sund, the sense that we were collaborating within a movement was strong in all of us as poets and as editor/publishers, but it was a movement that wasn’t only literary. It affected our views on economy, ethics, the environment, and philosophy. There was a difference from those academic poets whose aesthetic was adopted from the mainstream. Our aesthetic had been hammered out individually before evolving as a group, even though we’d been reading some of the same poets, were interested in a similar way of life. We each brought our own version of this Outsider aesthetic, and unlike more cerebral poets, we brought it from the Outside.

Robert Sund, as a former student of Roethke, and Snyder as a celebrated and renowned author and prize winner, were each our connective links to the Mainstream. Unlike other students of Roethke, Robert was a kind of refugee from the spotlight and the academic world, and so was Snyder. Bunch Grass, for an example, is unlike other books by Sund’s contemporaries. The famous poets who were also Roethke’s students and who used the outside world but were not in a similar sense “Outsiders” were James Wright, William Stafford, Carolyn Kizer, and the list goes on of poets who took Roethke’s classes and later became academics themselves. Few of whom sought out that “hermetic” life that fostered experience more than achievement.

William Stafford sent two poems for the first issue of *Dalmo’ma* and recommended his son, Kim Stafford be included in the second *Dalmo’ma*. Their poems are excellent examples of the kind of long-term investment in treating place as an idea, and a kind of intellectual reinhabitation.

On the other hand, John Haines once wrote,

“On the evidence of my own experience, I believe that one of the most important metaphors of our time is the journey out of wilderness into culture, into the forms of our complicated and divided age, with its intense confusion and deceptions. The eventual disintegration of these cultural forms returns us once more to the wilderness. This journey can be seen both as fall and reconciliation. And place, once again, means actual place, but also a state of mind, a consciousness. Once that place is established, we carry it with us, as we do our sense of selves.”

(William Scott Hanna, In Search of The Self, In Search of The Land: Toward a Contemporary American Poetics of Place, a dissertation, 2012)

Haines’ poems in *Dalmo’ma*, issue #2, are steeped in stone hard existential honesty, without reliance on hope. They make an interesting contrast to Kim Stafford’s more idealized poem. His “Living Basket House” imagines a literal reinhabitation, while Haines, the famous and longtime Alaskan homesteader, depicted a somewhat harsher reality in number VIII of his series “Forest Without Leaves.”

William Stafford, when asked how the Pacific Northwest affected his writing, denied much influence:

“Many writers in a place that is as definite a region as the Northwest feel that it is very much a part of their writing. I’m not too sure of that about me. . . . [My] attitude is this: where you live is not crucial, but how you feel about where you live is crucial. Since I live in the Northwest, yes, I do write about the Northwest in the sense that place names get in my poems, but as for anything mystical, it hasn’t registered on me. . . . I can say without any problem that the language [not the place] is what I live in when I write. I don’t want to say I’m not impressed by scenery; it registers. I know some writers who apparently live on it; they need a lot of scenery. It’s kind of a

distraction to me. . . . It’s a pleasant thought, but the idea that the style is rooted to the landscape just sounds sort of quaint to me.” “If Theodore Roethke hadn’t moved to Seattle, the scene would be the same, but the literary scene wouldn’t be the same.”

(Reading the Region: Northwest Schools of Literature)

One thing he seems to be advocating is that good writing in and about the Northwest in the end has perhaps stemmed less from the place than from the individuals—both native-born and newcomers—who have inhabited it. Yet, we were a group of editors, who each brought issues we cared about to the table, so to speak. And we cared because we were involved in this place. So, while I find Mr. Stafford’s statement about language to be true and that the people one associates with helps to create one’s feeling about a place, I think what set all of us off at a particular time in our lives, and in the history of our country, post-Vietnam, was the pure synchronicity of our accidental meetings here, where Admiralty Bay and the Strait of Juan de Fuca merge, at the tip of the Quimper and along the ridges and outcroppings of the Olympics.

In thinking about Empty Bowl, and the people involved, it’s significant to reflect that, although I, as an escapee from Boston, edited issues one and two of *Dalmo’ma*, by 1982, those included among the editors and board members were from all over the United States. Tim McNulty, Jerry Gorsline and I were New Englanders, while Finn Wilcox and Mike O’Connor are from the Pacific Northwest. Tom Jay and Sharon Doubiago started out in California, and support and encouragement came from the publishers of Copper Canyon Press, Sam Hamill, originally from Utah, and Tree Swenson from Washington, and Scott Walker of Graywolf Press from Portland, I think. Not to mention encouragement from the poet-novelists, Bill Ransom of Washington and Jim Heynen of Minnesota. Many of the people I just listed published collections or chapbooks of their own poetry with Empty Bowl Press.

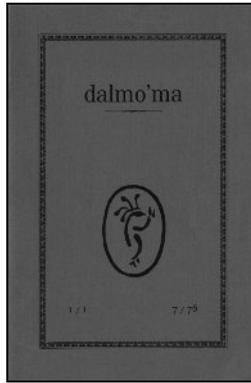
In addition, the beginnings of Empty Bowl, the birthplace if you will—like a manger in Bethlehem, was an army tent in the Olympic Mountains on a clearcut where Bob Blair, who’d recently moved here from the Southwest, and I hatched out a plan to begin a small, hand-made magazine about the size of *Poetry* or *Poetry Northwest*, that would come out once or twice a year and feature work by poets who were writing strictly about the mountainous, sea-going Pacific Northwest. My own goal was to be small and very local. To publish a magazine, not anthologies. And to edit each issue thematically. The end page of *Dalmo’ma* 2 in 1978, for instance, was a call for submissions of poems, essays and stories so specific to where we lived, they would be set in, and describe and witness only what we could discover in the same single watershed.

But life got in the way, and maybe because it was dormant for four years *The Dalmo’ma Anthology* of 1982 appeared as a collection of so many issues we were chastised by the *Seattle P.I.* The reviewer noted, “Every major cause is addressed—and the greater its popularity, the greater its prominence—with the effect, in the end, both of insincerity and tokenism.” It took me a while to get over what I thought of as outrage, but now, older and wiser, I can see that *The Dalmo’ma Anthology* would have been better had it been three or four issues of a magazine rather than an all-inclusive anthology. But as I said, while *dalmo’ma* lay dormant many concerns went unaddressed. Subsequent work on *Dalmo’ma* evolved in such a way that the editors of each were fewer and the scope more defined.

Digging for Roots, #5, had two editors, Christina Pacosz and Susan Oliver, and it’s a brilliant collection by women of the North Olympic Peninsula, much of it based in historical and pioneer experiences. *Working the Woods Working the Sea*, #6 also had two editors, Finn Wilcox and Jeremiah Gorsline, and focused on the fundamental work on this Peninsula, forestry and reforestation, and the fishing industry. This issue took Empty Bowl back to its roots, since so much of what we did as a collective group mirrored what had been done by Olympic Reforestation Inc., ORI, owned and operated by many of the same people as those involved in Empty Bowl—among them Finn, Mike, Jerry, Tim, Chuck Easton, yours truly—and supported by that group. To illustrate the collaboration of workers and poets and to show that many of us came from “elsewhere”, here’s my fondest memory of tree planting: four or five of us standing at the crest of a steep slope, a clearcut spread for hundreds of acres all around us, littered with slash and stumps, a lot of burn piles of roots and industrial waste. It’s a beautiful sunny day. We are taking a break, passing a joint around the circle. There are some newer crew members, and we’re just getting to know them. “So,” one of the new guys says on the inhale, “Where’d you all go to graduate school?”

To give you an idea of what it was like back then at the beginning of Empty Bowl, I’d like to read the beginning of my essay, “Running on Empty.”

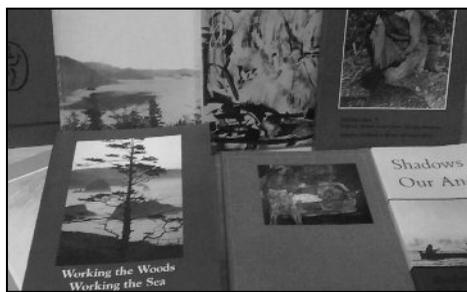
When we weren’t working in mud, when we weren’t covered in it, we were holed up in big green Army tents, smelly like the back of the truck, to dry out, keep warm,



cook a little stew for dinner, or make cheese sandwiches without leaving thumb prints, lie back and read. This was 1975, from November or December to April or May of '76, the Bicentennial year, Greyhound buses all over town. History everywhere, the tourist or antique hunter became its medium; in storefront windows sat old rockers, all shined up, beds and tables, date next to the price. But we escaped most of that for those four or five months we worked on the clear-cuts planting trees. Bob Blair and I shared a tent big enough for our cots, boxes of supplies and books stuffed underneath, a small round airtight wood stove, and a couple of lamps. The rest of the crew slept in tents except for those who'd done it once before; they were in homemade campers mounted on their decrepit pickups. A lot of time seems to have been taken up sitting in woolen longjohns, learning more efficient ways to dry our clothes. A system of lines ranged out from the safest point near the stove, clothes pins bearing the weight of socks and underwear. We cooked over the wood stove our odd concoctions of carbohydrates and protein; once I nearly gagged Tim McNulty with some barely cooked grain. Just before first light the mice in our food supply would wake us, we'd stoke the stove, cook some sorry coffee, get back into damp rain gear, and carry charcoal-stained cheese sandwiches onto the clear-cut, hip bags filled with mudball treelings, Doug Fir, probably harvested by now for the toilet paper mills (pleasureboatstudio.com).

In *Our Hearts & Minds*, #7, was my project almost exclusively, with the support and involvement of the Port Townsend Sister City program with Jalapa, Nicaragua, and groups working with Salvadoran refugees. The final *Dalmo'ma* anthology, #8, *Shadows of Our Ancestors, Reading in the History of Klallam-White Relations*, was edited by Jerry Gorsline and is a pioneering work, I think, in that it presents one of the most thoroughly investigated histories of a single tribe and its origins and connections to this place in historical and geological time.

Books by single authors began when we started to receive copies of Bill Porter's translations, printed and bound in Taiwan, I can tell you that *The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma* changed my life, and we also received from the Taiwan printers and binders, copies of Mike O'Connor's *The Basin*, which deftly illustrated the linkages of Pacific Rim cultures. The list of books by individual authors from that time includes first books and chapbooks by many now well-known Northwest poets, and I'll name some: Tim McNulty, Finn Wilcox with those emblematic photographs taken by Steve R. Johnson, Mike O'Connor, Bill Ransom, Tom Jay, Andrew Schelling, Sharon Doubiago, Mary Lou Sanelli, Judith Roche, the late Jody Aliesan—whose poems were beautifully complemented by Linda Okazaki's artwork.



Back to that model of the Pastoral, for a minute. We can't really talk about it without going all the way back to the Greeks and all their magical figures. The one that always impressed me, even before I read Agamemnon, was Cassandra. She was condemned to know the future and to never be believed. I think she's the archetype for contemporary poets like those of us who publish with Empty Bowl. Like Cassandra, our writing made public but couldn't prevent dangerous forestry practices, overfishing and polluting our waters, mass murders of Central Americans, or the occupation of Hood Canal and the Salish Sea by Trident, an illegal first strike weapon. Yet Empty Bowl was a kind of refuge for those of us who wrote "from and for the outside." Not in thinking of ourselves so much as Outsiders in the usual sense of having been overlooked, excluded or a "bad fit" for the mainstream market, but as shunning that approach to writing and the necessity of self-promoting. Empty Bowl was the vehicle for a collective energy of poets, artists, and community who cherished place, this place, this later called Cascadia Biome, bioregion, the wilderness then thought of as the Pacific Rim. Though now the term is more of a description for economists, in the 70s it described a geography and geology, it mapped out the climate history and civilization of a place that included native protectors along with Asian inhabitation of place and spirit. Hence the name *Dalmo'ma* a place for "digging roots" along the southern edge of this regional interest—an arm of lake Shasta to this day bears the tribal name, pit River.

Empty Bowl and *Dalmo'ma* anthologies were the artifacts, products of that collaborative and even tribal spirit that poets, artists and community working independently from their own aspirations to respond to this devotion to place could come together, see their art flourish as a body of collaborative energies in favor of protections that in the world of poetry had been too long ignored.

Michael Daley was born in Boston. In 1976 he was the founding editor of Empty Bowl press in Port Townsend. In 1983 Gary Snyder called his first collection of poetry, *The Straits*, "Superb, elegant poetically and fresh with the Northwest world."

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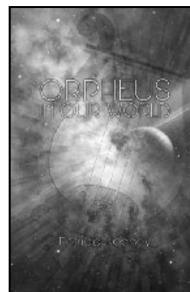


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A BEE GARDEN

Linda Rogers

The American poet Marianne Moore wrote that poems are “imaginary gardens with real toads in them.” I have known many poets on and off the page and no one resonates Moore’s definition quite like Ontario poet Marilyn Pilling, whose fifth poetry book, *A Bee Garden*, is a perfect fit, albeit requiring the suspension of disbelief as transformations occur. Her invisible toad, the god within and amphibian archetype for feminine waters and the life cycle, is the poet keeping track of the birds and bees in the garden of good and evil.

From the first poem, “What She’d Sowed,” in the garden inseminated by venomous honey-gatherers, to the last, “In the West Field” where bees and humans have laid down their weapons in an ode to pastoral harmony, nature trumps the ephemeral life of imperfect humans. Having met the narrator of these intensely personal and yet omniscient poems in the Oriente jungle, where she occupied herself with naming the abundant flora and feeding orphaned fauna, I was not surprised by her personal doctrine of signatures.

In poem after poem, Gear Pilling relates the conformation of humans and the natural world, a communion of sorts. In “Catch of the Day”

*The man in the white shirt bends, severs
certain ligaments*

*Bends again, sucks out
the eye.*

*Faces the small group of tourists,
swallows it,
whole, his eye on hers.*

There is magic in poems that belong to the oldest religion devised by gardeners and healers. Her simplicity of voice, incantations and spells dressed in homily, makes Gear Pilling a direct descendent of Al Purdy, our great poet of place, who, in one of his final poems, exhorted all who loved the world with words to, “Say the Names.” Purdy deplored the dearth of Canadian nature poets, another exception being the late Bronwyn Wallace, also an Ontarian. These poets, informed by the land, enclosed and wild gardens, have made poetry an essential component of ethical conservation and rational conversation.

*Yet every morning as the earth wakes from dream
each, according to
his ancestral notes and his own voice,
begins the day singing.*

...like bees going about their bee business, the communal conjugal life of the hive. This is romance and yet the sting in the nectar of romantic description is the cold eye of the fish in “Catch of the Day.” These poems do not shy from the brutal reality of death, and, like all poems, but only more so, more intensely felt, they are elegies: for a young girl who chose to collide with rather than ride the train, a classic Canadian symbol of sexual power and personal freedom, for youth, for marriage and for the endangered garden itself. The low note in these poems is grief but there is also the descant of joy to illuminate the nerve portal of the human eye.

Transformation, the formula of all poetry and cosmic jokes, is the infrastructure of Gear Pilling’s mythical landscape. In a world where innocence rushes to experience and chrysalis and child become something else, corrupted sometimes beatified, resilience is essential. The garden is seasonal. Love is the catalyst that keeps it sane, but there is always a delicate balance between birth and death, sanity and insanity, male and female. We must adapt, just as the bee with its royal jelly and venom must adapt in order to maintain the life of the hive. “I want them in, want to tell them how they go on changing, even in death.” Love is always the precursor to grief, its rude antithesis felt like



A Bee Garden
Marilyn Pilling
Cormorant Books
2013, paper.

pain in a phantom limb, but...“*It is not necessarily abnormal to have a chaotic heart.*”

Gear Pilling, who edits as carefully as she recently cut the hair of her husband of forty-seven years on a Cuban porch shaded by bougainvillea and hibiscus, selects the way her photographer spouse frames his shots, with care. Coming late to poetry after retiring from library science, she has made a science of language, balancing the agony and the ecstasy in nature and the life of the mind with the perspective of a mature poet who has done her research and discovered her own path to the light, in her words, “...a long journey over treacherous roads...”

Clarity and compassion are the elements of a well-wrought line and her images, luminous landscapes and family portraits exposed by that ruthless but respectful eye, the fish eye, the uncompromising lens, are felt because they have integrity. Just as a child or a cat will sit on the lap of the right person, these poems find their way home, just as she will.



Marilyn Pilling

*...there will be
no container, no temenos of love
waiting for me at the end.
I don't want to be dispersed. I want
to be held.*

These are tenacious poems. Perennials. They won’t let go. At the core of Pilling’s verses on love and loss there is no sentimentality but rather a *sensibility* that clings, because it speaks the deep language we shared long ago when we were children, before so called civilization, religion and politics, set up its barricades, the ones she breaks down tenderly and with respect so that we can witness the truths we need to survive.

Linda Rogers, who recently accompanied Marilyn Gear Pilling on a Canada Cuba Literary Alliance tour of the Oriente Province, was surprised by joy when she read *A Bee Garden*.

THE FLOUR PEDDLER (continued from page 14)

in South Sudan make it essential but dangerous for the brothers to leave the country expeditiously. ‘Exit,’ the last section details their separate departures. It’s an exciting account.

Perhaps the book’s structure is awkward because the authors attempt to educate the reader about agriculture, present their own philosophy and tell an adventure story all at once. This may not be a detraction for all, and it should not prevent anyone from reading this interesting book. The photographs included enrich the narrative and add to our understanding. Within the tale there are a few glimpses of the Hergesheimer family members who do whatever they can to support the brothers’ endeavours.

Journeying to South Sudan is difficult and dangerous. Global Affairs Canada advises against all travel to this new where ‘crime is widespread, demonstrations can turn violent and fighting continues.’ The authors are not idealists. They do not think ‘that quick impact, low-tech agriculture machines can save the world. But they might just save someone time and energy, as well as give that person the capacity to start a micro-enterprise’. Their epilogue to *The Flour Peddler* makes it clear that their travels and partnership work in developing countries is not over. Their next adventure should make an interesting story too.

Rose Morrison’s previous review for PRRB was Snapshot of a Soul Place (Spring 2016).

THE POST-BREXIT NOVEL?

Ewan Clark

“Three crows sat upon a wa’ on a cauld an’ frosty mornin’...”

In the traditional Scottish nursery rhyme “Three Crows”, each crow is afflicted with a particular problem - one crying for its mother, one breaking its jaw, and one unable to utter even the weakest of squawks. While all are burdened with their own problems, there is an important sense of collectivity as they sit together in the cold morning air. A shared feeling of brotherhood. An implicit camaraderie in which any individual issue is an issue to be tackled together. In the days and weeks after some of the most momentous decisions in modern political history, there is a need, now more than ever, to display such strong conviction to togetherness. But when divisive influences enter your life, how are they best dealt with? If one such crow decides to throw the proverbial spanner in the works, how should we react? As factions align and polarise still further, are we not then challenged to question our very identity? To take sides? To make sense of what it means to be Scottish, British or even European, to be Democrat or Republican? To be a global citizen? Are we still friends and allies? And if so, on what basis? While there may be both seismic and more mundane consequences to a Brexit or a Trump presidency, if this socio-political hornet’s nest doesn’t induce us to think about who we are and what we stand for, then nothing will.

And so to James Yorkston’s debut novel. A successful folk singer by trade, Yorkston takes the traditional Scottish literary heritage of Lewis Grassie Gibbon, mixes in an ample helping of Irvine Welsh and James Kelman, and creates a darkly humorous tale that questions not only the values of friendship and how far one is willing to go to preserve it, but introduces characters that echo the frustrated idealism of the multitude who spend their entire lives looking for something better. They are forced to look



Three Crows
James Yorkston
Freight Books, 2016
paper, 272 pages

closely at themselves and their relationships, re-evaluating past triumphs and failures to the point where their very moral fibre is tested. The use of colloquial language echoes that of Gibbon, and provides the characters with an authenticity that can only be born of fellow natives. In itself, building a linguistic wall that some readers will be happy to climb but that others will see as an unsurpassable obstacle that represents further division rather than synergy.

The novel begins with Yorkston removing his protagonist, Johnny, from London – the Xanadu for many a disillusioned provincial - and back to the rural life he so desperately wanted to escape. Art College apathy, tiny bedsits and pints on tick are surely no replacement for the open farmlands, thick local brogue, and brisk coastal air of his native Fife. Or will this merely be a classic tail-between-the-legs moment? Failure over ennui? The long bus journey north that has been taken by countless idealists whose bubble has long since burst. Beer running down the aisles and under the seats. Groggy attempts to sleep while that one passenger, in this case low-level drug dealer Mickey, races up and down the bus off his head on speed.

Upon arrival in an unwelcoming and disinterested milieu, where life has retained the simple formulae found in every such place, Johnny goes to stay with his old mate Stevie on a farm the latter has inherited from his uncle and aunt. And so the intrigue begins. Mickey is a constant presence in the margins of their new lives. Like the smell of horse manure drifting in the open kitchen window at dinnertime. He becomes a menace, the type of character we are all wary of and try desperately to avoid. But to what lengths would we go to achieve this? While the friends try to readjust to one another’s sudden re-emergence, so Mickey chips away until the daily drudge and tedium are threatened by something far more sinister. And the ultimate question is posed: can friendships that are largely based on nostalgia and shared moments of youthful triumph ever survive? Like Scotland, Britain, and Europe. The three crows sittin’ on a wa’.

Ewan Clark is a Scottish exile currently living on mainland Europe. A teacher, outdoorsman and romantic, he is currently working on a large-scale study into the life and work of Lew Welch.

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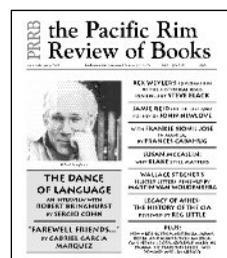
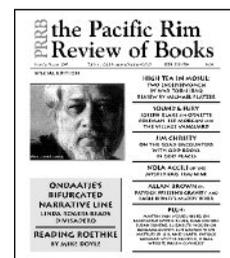
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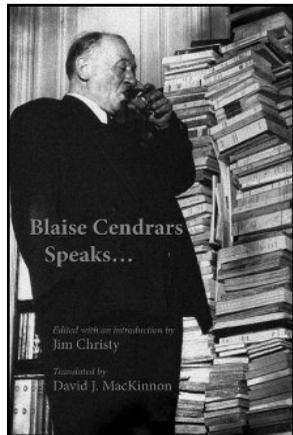
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NEW TRANSLATIONS OF A NOTORIOUS ELDER

Ryan Pastorchik



Blaise Cendrars Speaks
Blaise Cendrars,
David MacKinnon, trans.
Ekstasis Editions, 2016
paper, 214 pages

Credited by some with inventing modern poetry, French author Blaise Cendrars is linked to the Cubist, Dadaist, Beat, vagabonding, and other artistic movements that matured during the twentieth century. How is it that a writer with such credentials never appears on a university reading list or in the back of an anthology? *Blaise Cendrars Speaks* looks to bring the poet into the consciousness of the English-speaking community.

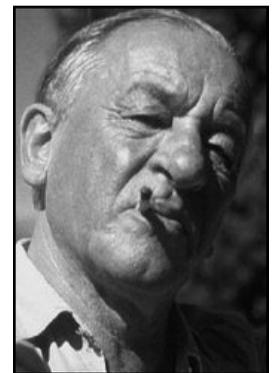
Originally published in 1952 under the title *Cendrars Vous Parle*, this collection consists of ten interviews between Cendrars and French radio host Michel Manoll. Vividly translated by David J. MacKinnon, the interviews reveal Cendrars' spontaneity without losing the profound hubris that he is known for. It becomes clear that Cendrars is a passionate collector of experience. Cendrars explains to Manoll that he has "had thirty-six careers, and [is] ready to start again tomorrow morning, to start something completely different." The diversity in Cendrars' experience is astounding: women's tailor, airplane fabricator, beekeeper, medical student, whaler, crocodile hunter, author and poet, juggler, soldier... Cendrars was notorious for allowing himself to be led by his instinct and inclinations. His spirit can be gleaned from a statement to Manoll: "very few people know how to live and those who accept life as it is are even rarer..." The fury with which Cendrars lived is consuming and ever-present within the interviews.

The recipient of the Paris Grand Prix for literature, Cendrars has had several archives established to preserve his work. Yet even with his authorial success, his opinions on writing reveal frustration and burden. Throughout the interviews, Cendrars constantly indicates that writing is not his passion, noting that "writing goes against my temperament..." and that "there's more to life than writing books." Cendrars describes how writing keeps him captive and sheltered from life, claiming that "poetry is in the street. It goes arm-in-arm with laughter. It takes it out for a drink, to the source, in the neighbourhood bistros, where the laughter of little people is so delightful and their dialects are so beautiful." Cendrars says he writes because he has to, because he is consumed: "It all came down to words. Words seduced me. Words perverted me. Words deformed me. That's why I'm a poet..."

Despite his sentiment that "writing is not really living," Cendrars was embedded within the heart of twentieth century European literature. A sometime companion of authors such as Hemmingway, Henry Miller, and Apollinaire, he is also credited by Manoll with influencing his peers. In some instances, such as his admission of ghost-writing for Apollinaire, Cendrars recognizes the claim. For the most part, he denies the connections, expressing a distaste for conversations that draw upon the names of famous writers and artists. At one point, Manoll acknowledges that Cendrars is "solely interested in desperate people, in children, in the disabled." Cendrars gifts the reader with his stories about these populations. Rather than discuss his connections with artists, Cendrars reveals instead his time spent with gypsies, his evenings drinking in bistros and cafes, or how he continues to write to a petrol station worker named Manolo Secca who was also a talented and prolific carver. When he does indulge Manoll, the stories are often unexpected and surprising. In a memory of Sinclair Lewis, Cendrars reveals how he saved Lewis' from drowning in a bathtub the night before Lewis received the Nobel Prize.

The interviews give us insight into a figure who preceded the Beat generation in his spirit of adventure, love of life, and refusal to accept a reality that he did not independently forge. At one point, Cendrars claims to have "possessed somewhere around twenty-seven houses in the countryside, all over the place..." He explains that he would use these houses to keep himself from remaining in one place for too long. He would spend his time moving, watching, and experiencing life, writing his stories in much the same way that later American poets would do.

His interviews provide an organic, diverse, and wildly intriguing vision of a legendary character. The experiences Cendrars shares seem impossible but, as author Jim Christy notes in his introduction, "that's what Cendrars did. He verified the unlikely, presented the extravagant and the outrageous alongside the quotidian and the nitty gritty, and made everyday life marvelous. He enhanced life and revered it." And so, this chance to hear the man so often written about by others speak for himself.



Blais Cendrars

Ryan Pastorchik holds degrees from the University of the Fraser Valley and Simon Fraser University. He works in alternative education in the Fraser Valley.

THE LAST WORD IN MODERN SONNETS

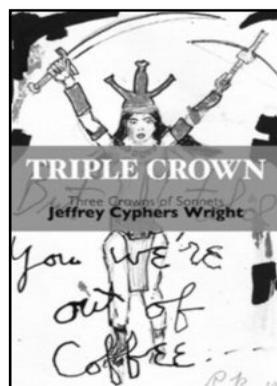
Ilka Scobie

Jeff Wright's lyrical liberties propel the traditional sonnet on a worldwide dash. Every poem is "Made in..." somewhere—beginning with China. In the second poem, "Made in Hong Kong," the initial entreaty beckons with musical sophistication: anagrammatic words coupled in a double-beat rhyme scheme.

*Come to me now, unkind whirlwind
Come to me now and unwind, wunderkind.*

In "Made in Naples" a romantic incantation is at once triumphant and forlorn. Adding complexity, Wright throws in the homonym "bow."

*I watched her take a bow at the slam tonight
One more time, she hit on her true mark
and let fly an arrow to my still beating heart.*



Triple Crown, Sonnets
Jeffrey Cyphers Wright
Spuyten Duyvil, 2013

offbeat imagery.

The forty-eight sonnets of "Triple Crown" are divided into three parts. Some lines repeat but not in the strict order of a conventional crown. Instead, recurring themes and topoi add structural cohesion. This sonnet garland adheres to the sensuous 14-line forms of Petrarch and Shakespeare while incorporating the innovative jump-cuts and punchy vernacular of Ted Berrigan (who Wright studied with).

Emily Brontë is Wright's muse and consort and is often beside him as he wakes up again and again.

*I woke at the end of a punch line
Emily, by my side, always happy to be alive.*

Elsewhere, Brontë sits on a wasp's nest, reads Konqueror protocol in a bikini, and is "drizzled with jazz." Her nether regions are jazzily extolled: "Give me your fur-lined poon." She even visits the Zinc Bar where Larry Fagin is quoting Chekov and the bartender is carding an underage kid nick-named Piper.

In this anachronistic present built on a literary past, Wright also hangs out with Apollo, Venus, and Astarte as well as with New York poets like Bernadette Mayer,

(continued on page 45)

THE LIFE AND ART OF MARY FILER

Julia Dovey

Christina Johnson-Dean is a teacher and writer hailing from Victoria, BC. Her works include *The Crease Family: A record of Settlement and Service in British Columbia* and two other publications in The Unheralded Artists of BC series.

When one thinks fame and success, one thinks actor, or singer, or even author. Nowadays, one might even think politician. One does not immediately think artist. Glass artist, even less so. Canadian glass artist? Forget about it.

And wait—she’s a woman? Born in 1920? One couldn’t ask for a lower glass ceiling. I suppose, then, it’s a good thing Mary Filer’s medium was broken glass.

The Life and Art of Mary Filer by Christina Johnson-Dean is the ninth book of The Unheralded Artists of BC series. With this title in mind, the tumbleweed that bounced across my empty brain when it read the name Mary Filer was at worst expected, and at best a compliment to the series. As a person who knows well enough the struggles to be known in the art world, not recognising the name Mary Filer only enhanced the book’s validity. Unheralded, indeed.

As I worked my way through page after glossy page of text and pictures, I could see that Mary Filer had a lifelong knack for pushing boundaries to their very limit. In her



Mary Filer

long life, she bore the titles of artist, nurse, therapist, and teacher, moving between Canada, New York, and the UK, and frankly obliterating the classic image of the mid-twentieth century woman. The glow of power and confidence was evident in her art; from her Picasso-esk portraits of smooth, sure lines that mocked stuffy perfectionists, to the unique, geometric sculptures of glass in her later years that set her apart from all other Canadian artists. This confidence was not limited to her professional life; the Saskatchewan artist experienced a steady stream of relationships, both casual and serious, not to mention feeling quite alright being photographed in the nude. Although I could sense a touch of melancholy woven through Mary’s story for the children she never bore, there never seemed to be a point in which she regretted the devotion of both her

professional life and personal life to art. In her words, “If a woman is an artist, she [should be] an artist before she is a woman.” And yet, she was a mother, in her own way; “the godmother of the glass art scene.”

Throughout the text, light seemed to be a prevailing theme. From her birth at the winter solstice, to her later use of glass and light as her medium, its presence is everywhere in the narrative. Even physically, the book reflects this motif (pun intended) with its shining cover and thick, glossy pages. The implication, of course, is that Mary herself is a light, an influential soul that illuminated the path both for Canadian glass

artists and for the women who wished to rise above the role of the dowdy, virtuous homemaker. Whether Mary Filer considered herself a feminist is not explicitly stated;



The Life & Art of Mary Filer

Christina Johnson-Dean
Mother Tonger
Publishing Ltd. 2016
paper, 140 pages



Christina Johnson Dean

continued on page 44

U GIRL

Ali Siemens

Less than 100 kilometers east of Vancouver’s city centre, the Cultus Lake region of the Fraser Valley is nestled between mountain ranges and rivers. This once-upon-a-time-hamlet is far enough away to be considered a different world from the progressive city. Vancouver resident and Canadian author, Meredith Quartermain takes her readers through the lens of a young woman challenging her small town looking glass with a much wider angle. Born in Toronto, Quartermain understands the trials of travelling from forest to a jungle while delivering her voice through a budding student.

Vancouver has always been the hub of where the cool and creative types live. Frances, or U Girl, has left the back roads of the Valley and is claiming her identity in the city. Like most of us who have moved from small town comforts to making it in the metropolis, we start to challenge values and experiences that have previously shaped us. Enrolled in the English program at UBC, Frances embarks on her own literary journey and begins writing a novel. But what parts of the relationships matter to her story? Does everyone get a role? Is the sex important? What about the season during which it happened? Does the colour of her rooming house bedroom capture the tone?

Recognizing post secondary education is a place of privilege, Quartermain adjusts her images of the libraries at UBC, not as institutions of accessibility, but a reminder of the greats that came before us. Frances is a smart woman, evaluating the dichotomy of novel-worthy experiences and the narratives born of conversations in the filing room of her part-time job at an insurance company.



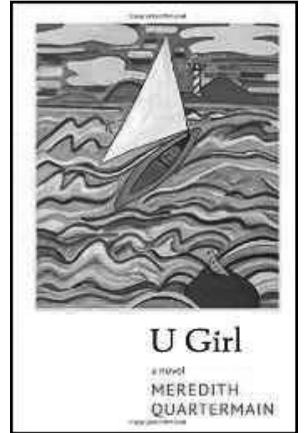
Meredith Quartermain

and her roots give her the perspective others seem to lack.

Literary nuances cascade over Frances. The constant floods of humanity versus humility take up space in her world. Reviewing each other’s work, Dagmar critiques Frances’ novel by telling her, “people don’t want to read about nice things.” This notion plays into the story of U Girl herself, experiencing the ugly truths about living in a rooming house in poverty, next door to adults with crestfallen dreams.

The West Coast poet Jack Spicer summarized his life with a whisper, “my vocabulary did this to me.” Frances struggles with a similar plight. Born in the Valley, she has experienced life on Cultus Lake and the stillness it commands. Reasserting her gaze on the ocean, the beating waves and tide that cloaks over the shore reminder both her and us of how quickly the weather changes. Much like her characters in her novel, the pace and lessons of life are far from stagnant and she continues to forge on to a new frontier.

Ali Siemens was born in the Fraser Valley and has recently placed roots in Vancouver.



U Girl

Meredith Quartermain
Talon, 2016
paper, 240 pages

RAVENSCRAG

Peter McCambridge

“My name is Alain Farah. I ate my mother. Everything is under control.”

It’s complicated. Written by Alain Farah, Pourquoi Bologne, here translated by Lazer Lederhendler as *Ravenscrag* and published by House of Anansi’s Arachnide imprint, involves a writer named Alain Farah who is simultaneously living in Montreal in 1962 and 2012. (In fact, at one point there is even a further collapse of time as Farah’s mother becomes a child once again, asking for her father: “The year was 1962. For my mother, it was 1912.”) There are no markers to indicate time changes, only hints of context that make it more or less obvious that the narrative has advanced or fallen back 50 years with a change in paragraph.

“The year is 1962,” the narrator explains at one point. “I don’t know where I come from or where I’m going.” And later:

The year is 2012 and 1962.

The year is 1962 and 2012.

It’s cold.

Something’s not right, but what?

Someone, somewhere, is controlling us.

This is the problem. But will there be answers?

There is a long digression on *Blade Runner* and even the odd brachiosaur. Paranoia and the looming shadow of mysterious CIA-funded experiments are everywhere—“tying my tie would silence the voices in my head telling me my face is not my face”—and our narrator is, naturally, unreliable.

“You’ve read my books, but everything I say in them is false,” he tells a young woman at the inauguration of Place Ville Marie. “You know nothing about me other than my name.” And to add to the Russian dolls effect, Alain Farah the character goes on to tell her that he himself is writing a novel, called *Nevermore* (also the title of this novel’s final section). He even wishes he was a character in a novel at one point.

“I concentrate very hard on the action to grasp its hidden significance,” he confesses to the reader a little later with a nod and a wink, “but it’s no use, the meaning grows more opaque.”

The novel’s effect is indeed playful and confusing in this dreamlike narrative as nonsense sequences parade by, sentences frequently tacked on without bringing any meaning or logical flow to proceedings:

“The woman is charged with murder; her fingerprints were found on her sunglasses.”

The reader is addressed directly. Nothing particularly new there, but Farah does manage to go further than most, beyond the “It’s freezing in this office, don’t you find?” and up to the point of calling for characters so we can see them for ourselves:

Hold on, I’ll call her again on the intercom to ask her to come by to see us, since we’re talking about her. I’m sure you’ll love her.

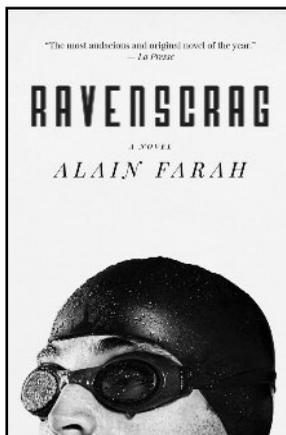
It all makes for a writing style that veers from the pleasantly self-conscious to the mildly infuriating:

“I’ll cut here, before my mother’s reaction. One might say I’m leaving her off camera, but it’s actually an editing effect, to be read not as something done out of a sense of decency, but as the recognition of failure that comes whenever I write. Literature simply doesn’t measure up to life.”

This fiction/reality dichotomy exploring the Alain Farah the character/Alain Farah the novelist relationship is given further depth in translation. A new layer comes not only with the translation from French into English but also Lederhendler’s rendering of dialogue in English in the original, which has been changed and tidied up in his version of the text.

Farah’s “Anyways [...] something is wrong” becomes Lederhendler’s “Anyway [...] something’s the matter,” for example, with “Push, Mrs. Safi, push, you are almost done” also changed to “Push, Mrs. Safi, push, you’re almost there.”

Lederhendler’s translation is every bit as good as we might expect, by the way. I had a great time of things flicking between the French and the English and seeing *discrète* translated as inconspicuous, *chasser* become shoo away, a skirt shaken



Ravenscrag
Alain Farah
translated by Lazer
Lederhendler
House of Anansi, 2015



Alain Farah

subtly in French shaken delicately in English, and even a cockamamie story crop up (*une histoire tirée par les cheveux*). Lederhendler does, however, belong to a generation of translators that still translates “*Vous n’êtes pas obligé de*” as “You are not obliged to”—when is the last time you heard anyone say that?—and there are a few clunky phrases here and there, like an “inciting incident” (*un événement déclencheur*). Lederhendler sticks close to French-sounding words

whenever possible (implication in someone’s death rather than involvement, *posséder* is possess, *participer* is participate, *je perçois son existence* is I perceive its existence), a school of translation that I recognize to be entirely valid, although it is not one I belong to. There are even a few additions that make the English text sound more French than the original (edifice for Farah’s structure, veracity for *réalité*). That said, the translation certainly doesn’t detract from the reading experience, with readers more likely to be frustrated with Farah’s postmodern anti-narrative than find themselves quibbling over the occasional word choice.

The reading experience is scant on reward, but the book nevertheless provides a useful snapshot of a current of literature being published in Québec at the moment, much of it by Le Quartanier. Often dubbed “difficult” literature, it is short on plot and heavy on artifice, more often than not feeling to me like an exercise in style that outstays its welcome over the course of 200 pages.

“In the end I’m like you,” the narrator admits to the reader halfway through. “I don’t understand what I understand.”

It’s all very clever. Yes, it is confusing and playful. But it’s not the most satisfying read.

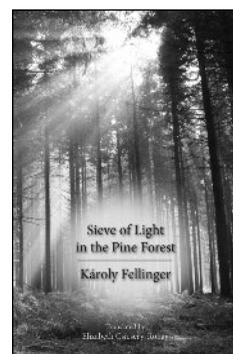
Peter McCambridge is the translator of half a dozen books, the founding editor at QuebecReads.com, and a past winner of the John Dryden Translation Prize. His most recent translation is *The Closed Door* by Lori Saint-Martin (Ekstasis Editions). He lives in Québec City.

MARY FILER (*continued from page 43*)

however, she certainly did her part in showing that it was all right to trade the spatula for a paintbrush, to forgo the glass of milk in favour of a strong martini. As with any art, Mary Filer’s included, the book itself is not without fault. It is extremely information heavy, with dates and names tumbling over each other in a fashion that can make a reader dizzy if not completely engaged; it certainly isn’t a book to be read sans morning coffee. Nonetheless, *The Life and Art of Mary Filer* is true to its name, and is as thorough a telling of a life unheralded as one can hope for.

Mary Filer lived a long, full life, and died in 2016. Christina Johnson-Dean has given her worthy send off in this biography, one that will hopefully continue to shine a light upon an artist, not to mention an art form, that many Canadians might not have otherwise recognised. The tumbleweed will bounce no longer in my mind; and I assure you, the day I finally try a martini, I will observe the gleam of light upon in the glass, and remember Mary Filer.

Julia Dovey writes from Aldergrove, British Columbia. She is currently working towards publishing her first novel.



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CZAGA (continued from page 23)

is more like a poem than most poems are,” she writes, and—in a way that recalls Seamus Heaney’s “Digging”, describes the way he goes about with his metal detector “until it beeps / solemnly above a nickel. With a butter knife / he cuts such slender metaphors from the earth.”

For Your Safety Please Hold On also includes the first poem I read by Czaga, which was pinned for some time to the wall of my office. “Poem for Jeff” is this surprisingly reverent poem full of expletives. It lists all the various people, animals, and things in the world as if taking inventory of the tragically doomed. For example, “Fucked / are the CEOs and the graceful lines of women buying oranges / in December”. In the language reserved for expressing intense, sudden pain or rage, Czaga draws our attention to the universality of suffering.

Innocence, experience, nostalgia, and the bittersweet are braided together throughout this collection to shape a thoughtful, down-to-earth exploration of love, creativity, and life in a modern, urban world. Besides that, it will transport you to a place of contemplation on your forthcoming public transit journeys.

Katie Stobbart is the editor of *Raspberry magazine*, a publication featuring coverage of art, culture, and community life in the Fraser Valley. She writes from Abbotsford. Her poetry and art has been published in *Louden Singletree* and by the Poetry Institute of Canada.

TRIPLE CROWN (continued from page 42)

Eileen Myles and David Shapiro. Pan-mythic in scope, Wright draws on Native American and Asian deities as well.

“Speak to me then, Gray Wolf
Let the moon hurl its guts across the sky
Ducks huddle-bobbing on glass river glance
No gate to stay forever shut
Unconsumed by the present I present the now
The Dusters tonight at Mongrel Hall
WANNA BE GOD’S TOY
Let’s get hammered, Thor”

The function of imparting information has not always been absent from poetry. Wright recognizes the deep desire to read for knowledge as well as pleasure. Twenty pages of notes at the end provide the curious reader with lots of information about references in the poems, meandering from scientific terms to Emma Goldman quotes. Fusing geography with lexicology we can find out what many of the place names mean. We learn, for instance, that Cucamonga means “sandy place” in Shoshone.

Infused with beatnik bonhomie, Wright’s enthusiasm animates these pages. Included are his evocative collages, one of which first appeared in *Live Mag!*, Wright’s eclectic and excellent art and poetry magazine.

Though these sonnets are entitled with exotic locales, the poems resound with East Village élan. A long time downtowner, Wright is equally confident quoting mythology, technology and rock lyrics. He makes lemonade out of his lemons as he riffs on rejections from literary magazines and feels like “The jester making a cameo on the Jetsons” in “Made in Cheyenne.”

Triple Crown thrusts us into the urbane interior life of a true poet and pioneer, who juggles creativity with the quest for legal tender, romance with reality, and passion with pranks. This is a book to read through in a rush, to appreciate the soul and syncopation — and then at random, to re-read, digest and savor on multiple levels. Like a true post punk troubadour, Jeff Wright provokes and entertains, challenging readers to join his cosmic leap.

Ilka Scobie is a native New Yorker and long time downtown resident. She teaches poetry in the public schools and writes about contemporary art for London’s Artlyst. She is currently Associate Editor of LiVE MAG!



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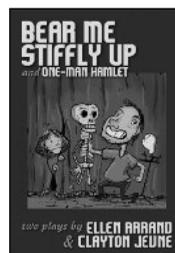
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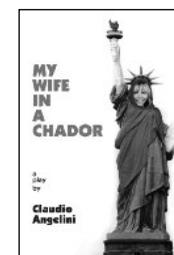
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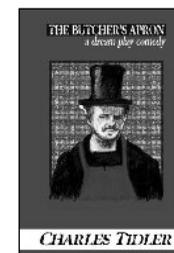
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L'ANNÉE LA PLUS LONGUE

Peter McCambridge

L'*année la plus longue*—Daniel Grenier's first novel following an initial collection of short stories, also published by Le Quartanier—is impressive both in scope and ambition. The action (because, despite the clear literary merits of this novel, there is action and plenty of it) revolves around three men: Thomas Langlois (who, growing up in Tennessee, has been given a French name he is barely able to pronounce), his father Albert (“Al-bear”), and their ancestor and contemporary Aimé.

The novel opens with a deportation on the Ohio River in 1838. The first part then bounces around in time in Chattanooga, Tennessee (1987, 1994, 1998) before moving on to a second and then a final part that takes us from 1864 to 1760 to 1863, to Newport, Montreal, Québec City, Philadelphia, Sainte-Anne-des-Monts, and Kansas. There are lots of stops in between, with Grenier hitting the sweet spot of allowing the reader to savour the excellent writing of the present moment while turning pages with relish to find out what happens next.

This is the story of an “American family as long and as old as the Mason-Dixon line.” It is also, even more so, the story of the Québec branch of the family tree, changing shape and moving off in different directions, with a dollop of magic realism thrown in for good measure. It is a tale of burned bridges and lost family ties, of belonging and not, of personal tragedies and major world events, of too many parallel stories to list here but not too many to lose track of, all combined in a satisfying blend of the everyday and the enchanting.

The novel boasts a long list of laudable, distinguishing characteristics. At times, Grenier's style seems similar to that of Eric Dupont in his desire to combine the characters and affairs of rural Quebec with international events, particularly American ones. And, at times, the smorgasbord of characters and jumps in time remind me of Catherine Leroux's *La marche en forêt*. But the style is, of course, entirely of Grenier's own making.

Its most distinguishing feature is probably the narrative “we” as the story is “narrated by us and understood through the filter of our distant, speculative imaginations [...] from the warmth of our homes on the shores of the St. Lawrence, as winter sets in and the smoke rising from the factories turns opaque in the steel-blue sky.”

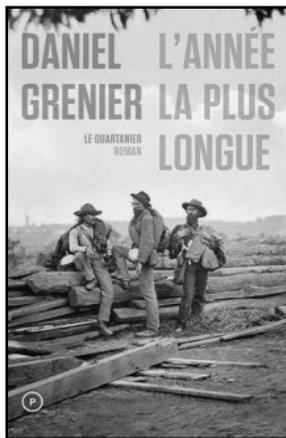
Most of all, though, *L'année la plus longue* is the “story of a man who couldn't grow old.” His name is Aimé.

In conditions difficult to describe, difficult to imagine for those of us comfortably seated in our armchairs, it was doubtless in suffering and in fear, in slurry or in hay, that he was born, under the protection and the yoke of the occupying army, behind an almost closed door that creaked and under the Union Jack that flapped with every gust of wind from the fortress's highest tower.

Aimé was born on February 29, making him a Leaper and, later, the founding member of the Order of the Twentyniners. In 1925, he looks like he's just turned forty when, in fact, he has been around for over a century and a half. Because he only ages on his actual birthday—every four years. He is one of those “who were born in the midst of a strange time vortex, who were special by definition, whom time did not absorb in the same way.” Or, as another character puts it: “Stories from way back have it that this extra day every four years, desired by men but rejected by God, is a portal to the other world.”

But make no mistake: this is not science fiction. Here, the story is not a flimsy excuse for “what if?” scenarios and the exploration of parallel worlds. In this novel, the root of the narrative—the 29th day of February that makes it possible for Aimé to fight in the American Civil War, to discuss whether sound will come soon to motion pictures, and to board a flight to Europe at JFK—might be magical, but Grenier is first and foremost a storyteller, bringing to life the poetry of the everyday in a story that is intricately put together without ever appearing convoluted or contrived.

The magic realism is put to good use, adding warmth and depth to a busy storyline and transforming an ambitious plot that takes in a swath of North America stretching



L'année la plus longue
Daniel Grenier
Le Quartanier, 2015



Daniel Grenier (photo: Frédérick Duchesne / Le Quartanier)

from the Gaspé Peninsula to Tennessee into a saga of epic proportions, based around three mountain ranges: the Great Smokies, the Alleghenies, and the Chic-Chocs.

There is magic at work here, but it is largely in the writing. It is images of a dog being dropped from a window that stay with us. Of burning crosses and masked faces, people walking around with radioactive radium watches, rags that cling to the body “like a second skin, dirty and diseased,” a woman looking up, a “smile of clothespins in her mouth,” the sound of a passing train exploding in a “symphony of metal and steam.”

The writing shines when Aimé looks back on the American Civil War from Philadelphia in 1893:

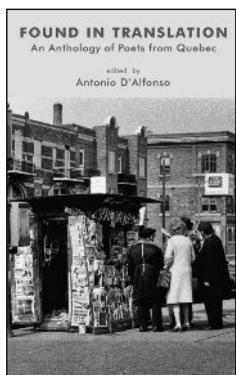
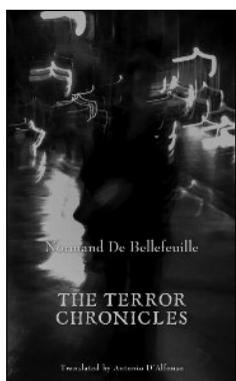
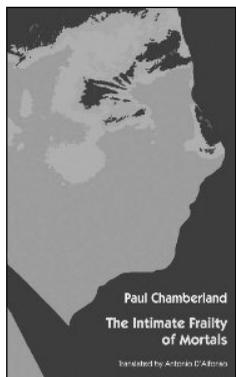
He described how the sun, filtering through the long clouds of grey rain, had given him the impression that it was all over, that everyone would go home now, scarred but alive, that it had made him wrongly believe the horror was over an incalculable number of times. But it was inevitable; he couldn't stop thinking it. He explained how he had thought of his mother, whom he had never known, but whom he liked to imagine telling him goodbye with silent tears, telling him goodbye near to the fence they would have built together to protect the hens from the foxes and the coyotes. He didn't think of his wife, or the woman he loved, or a sometime lover he would have left behind, but of a mother who would have agreed to let him go off to war, him and his illusions of heroism and courage, crying silently with stoical eyes. [...] Aimé described how, once the battle had started, it took on its own living form, began to have its own life, with an ecology, a geology, and an unpredictable breath, sometimes panting, sometimes short, sometimes strangely at ease.

There are mentions of Louis-Joseph Papineau, Benedict Arnold, Daniel Morgan, and William Randolph Hearst, cameos even from characters created by other Quebec novelists. There are the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, Quebec's ice storm of 1998. And there is the gasp of satisfaction that comes when a narrative thread from page 35 is picked up and tied in a tight, satisfying knot on page 329.

This is a fine story, well told. What more could we ask for?

Peter McCambridge is the translator of half a dozen books, the founding editor at QuebecReads.com, and a past winner of the John Dryden Translation Prize. His most recent translation is *The Closed Door* by Lori Saint-Martin (Ekstasis Editons). He lives in Québec City.

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THE NEWS

Chelsea Pastorchik

In his second poetry collection, Rob Taylor celebrates his wife's first pregnancy – he writes one poem a week from the fifth week to the fortieth week, all addressed to his child. The writing, like the cover of the book, is organic and beautiful. The words, images, and ideas in each poem pile upon each other, sparse fragments that work together intricately and richly: “Your mother guides my hand to the spot/ and of course nothing. No, something – / my hand on her belly. A story to tell./ A west-facing bedroom still full of light./ Once, and then when I waited, a second time.”

Throughout the collection, Taylor explores the relationships between generations. Often, this is revealed by both the anticipation and the apprehension he feels at the thought of bringing life into the world. He imagines endless conversations centering on the baby: “we'll just keep talking about you/ until it seems we've conjured you from our dreams.” He recognizes, however, that no amount of talking, no amount of connection, will ever fully join his life with his baby's life, or his wife's, noting: “Our journeys/ are not the same, as yours/ will be beyond our reach.” This echoes the apprehension of all parents – who will my child be when they step out into the world? Taylor also celebrates this self-determination, claiming: “When you arrive, you will make mothers/ and sisters, hope and history.”

For Taylor, his baby's development also serves as a calendar on which to mark world events. Each major milestone in the pregnancy is tied to a headline: the first image of the baby came the same day as the Charlie Hebdo shootings, Benjamin Netanyahu addressed congress the day the baby's bloodwork came back healthy, the baby moved on the day an ISIS spokesman wore a Pittsburg Pirates cap... The baby, before it even enters the world, is defined by these events. Taylor tries to shield the baby from these associations: “Grow, grow –/ don't worry militias or migrants, looters,/ objectors – their numbers like stars.” The pull of context is too strong though, and, in nearly the last poem of the collection, Taylor again ties his baby to the news:

*“In the summer of your birth/
'See You Again' topped the charts
and I lost track of the shootings. By police. Of police. In boot
and box-shaped states/ in another nation. In pairs,
in groups, in crowds. In Canada
we kill our women one by one
and by the time we notice
the anchorman is on to sports
and weather...”*

Taylor crafts a time-capsule for his child, a clear picture of the world it is about to be born into.

Taylor also crafts a sense of place for the reader, and his poems are rich with local imagery. For readers familiar with the Pacific Northwest, reading these poems is like a scavenger hunt – you eagerly gather up small bits of landscape, fitting them into the whole you know and love. Some details work together to build a map of Vancouver: a park at 10th and Fir, a Kitsilano dinner date, the corner of 8th and Maple, and crossing 4th, York and Creelman. Other details feel as if they are there only for the people who know this place – Taylor paints geese, seagulls, rhododendrons and cherry blossoms against a backdrop of gas stations, churches and busses. Tantalizingly, he also takes the reader to the backcountry: “Bowls/ and peaks and glaciers/ in all directions./ More than a dozen lakes./ And so much air/ and space.” While the other pieces of his world are located with specificity, he keeps this spot for himself.

This collection feels incredibly intimate. Taylor writes: “All this speaking of nothing/ and pretending it's you,/ though you are ever nearer/ and will one day spot/ within these words/ the man I was.” (49) Through these poems the reader glimpses not only Taylor's excitement about the birth of his child, but also the man he wants his child to see – thoughtful, hopeful, uncertain and passionate. You are invited into his home, lay in his bed, feel the child move in his wife's belly, but ultimately, you are left stranded in the fortieth week of pregnancy, while life for Taylor and his family continued beyond the bounds of the book. It is an odd experience for a reader, to feel trapped in the pages of a book while the characters roam free.

Chelsea Pastorchik is an alternate high school teacher in Chilliwack, B.C. She writes from Abbotsford.

The News
Rob Taylor
Gaspereau, 2016
paper, 57 p.

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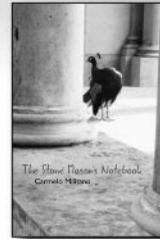


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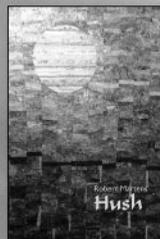
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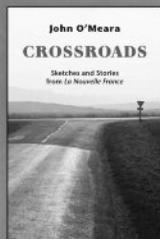


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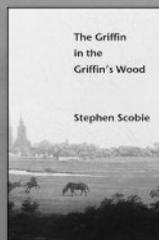


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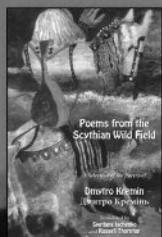
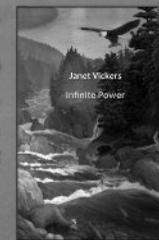
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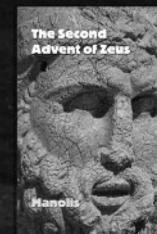
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