

Douglas Barbour

Review Article Canadian Poetry Chronicle 2:

As the good books pile up, let alone the OK ones and the inevitable bombs – none of which made it to the reviewer this time – I can only attest to the fact that it's a very good time to be carrying on a nationalist love affair with Canadian literature. One dominant impression emerges from this bunch of books to confirm the feeling that has long been taking possession of me: there is no one overriding theme these poets share which could be labelled 'Canadian'. Many of them share the eternal themes of dreams and art, but our best poets, like the best artists anywhere, are too individual and cantankerously original to be categorized together under any other rubric than that of country. I for one am glad to have them here and writing.

Routes/Roots, Elizabeth McLuhan's first collection of poems, is an interesting apprentice work which suggests that Ms. McLuhan will offer a much better collection next time. Many of the early poems in this collection reveal the author's sensitivity to sound patterns, rhymes and song rhythms. On the other hand, she betrays the usual neophyte tendency towards abstract language. I suspect these early poems would go quite well as pop songs, but they seem too generalized on the page, and I can find little *felt* emotion in them despite their insistence upon loneliness in love, or alienation in the modern city.

Slightly later poems (all are dated), especially those in the third part of the book, revel in a lot of Joycean puns/spellings. McLuhan is obviously fully aware of the potential for meaningful ambiguities inherent in such word-play. Although many of these poems are a bit too didactic for my taste, the playfulness of their language rescues them from over-pretentiousness.

Quite suddenly, in the fourth section, the 'voice' of the poems is placed in a felt landscape. New Mexico seems to have forced McLuhan to ground her speech in the world 'out there': the language is concrete, sharply imagistic, evocative in its implications rather than strident in its rhetorical statements: "bleached white skulls crown/the fence posts/beyond private metamorphosis/part of a pattern now/I look but am not free". These poems, I hope, point the way to future work in which personal emotion and metaphysics will emerge through a concise articulation of perceived events captured in sharply focused language and rhythms. Meanwhile, *Routes/Roots* is a nice introduction to a young poet I believe we shall hear from again.

Sometimes All Over is a strong first book from a poet whose careful intelligence manifests itself in every poem. Don Coles has waited longer than usual to publish his work; the result is a book of substance and occasional profound power. Coles is obsessed with time and time's influence on us all. His best poems are personal meditations on time's touching his loves, his relations or himself. They look to a past now lost and unchangeable or to a present all too swiftly becoming irrevocable past. In these poems people and events emerge with clarity and precision to beguile and intrigue us. Coles's language is concrete and cuttingly personal; it co-opts our emotional assent to the pain or joy he explores. In other poems, more clearly a result of Coles's reading or research, the thought is still interesting but the language is slacker, more abstract, and the edge of tension which can be felt in such poems as "separating" or "Six Meditations after the Event" is missing. I can enjoy the intellectual games of "Death of Women" but it doesn't call me back as does the truly moving meditation on family history in "Photograph", a piece about Coles's grandparents. *Sometimes All Over* is a welcome book, heralding as it does a new poet of genuine power in our midst. With all its misses, it contains a number of palpable hits, poems which in their smoky passion, the tension of their wayward rhythms, and the process of discovery they map, insinuate themselves into our lives.

Doctor Umlaut's Earthly Kingdom contains three of Phyllis Gotlieb's dramatic poems, interlaced with some shorter poems, for a kind of continuity throughout. The whole is a somewhat ribald, somewhat wry, somewhat wistful carnival-of-life-commentary. Gotlieb uses folk-wisdom, Biblical references, children's rhymes and a few too many conventional representatives of mankind's many foibles to fill her large canvas. The three dramatic poems, "Doctor Umlaut's Earthly Kingdom", a carnival of life versus death, "The Contract", a tightly-wrought sf fantasia, and "Garden Varieties", two miracle plays in search of a cast, are didactic fables. As such they do their proper job, but I find the first and last ones a bit too cute in places. I suspect they worked far better over the radio waves than they do on the page. Some of the shorter pieces are vintage Gotlieb and to be welcomed as such. I found the selection of new poems in a recent *Canadian Forum* more intriguing all round. Although *Doctor Umlaut's Earthly Kingdom* is good entertainment, it failed to engage me as fully as Ms. Gotlieb's earlier collections did.

In *Borderlands*, Don Gutteridge writes a series of poems 'about' the story of John Jewitt's three years with the Nootkas after he was taken prisoner by Maquina, their chief, in 1802. In this endeavour, Gutteridge continues to pursue the muse of early Canadian history as he did in his poems on Louis Riel and Samuel Hearne. Unlike *Coppermine*, *Borderlands* incorporates large swatches of prose taken directly from a number of different journals. Gutteridge often juxtaposes these extracts with his own poems in a fascinating manner.

Maquina and Jewitt are the main speakers in *Borderlands*, but some of the other visitors to the Nootka region between 1778 and 1805, John Meares, Jose Mozino, an anonymous Spaniard, are also allotted a few speeches. I feel that one problem with the sequence is the lack of sufficient differentiation among the various voices. All the lyrics read interestingly, and the continual imagistic focus on the meaning of ocean, mountains and forests, and the narrow strip of livable land between, builds

nically throughout. Nevertheless, the poems tend to sound alike, and it is more than a little exasperating to move from the 18th century style of Jewett's journal to the 20th century sexual innuendo of lines like "as I ride my/one-eyed foxy lady/all night long". Violence and sexuality are closely attuned to one another, it is true, but Gutteridge's expression of this close relationship, in both *Coppermine* and *Borderlands*, strikes me as too specifically of the 1960s and 1970s; the idiom he uses is *modern*, and this disengages me from the poetic-documentary exploration of the past he appears to be attempting in these poems. *Borderlands* is interesting, and the journal extracts are brilliantly chosen, yet I cannot help feeling that Gutteridge sacrifices too much in his search for psycho-historical relevance.

Name is Seymour Mayne's largest collection of poems, and a winner of the J.I. Segal Prize in English-French literature. It is, indeed, an often entertaining collection of poems, a *pot-pourri* of Mayne's various types of poetry. I find many of the *kinds* of poetry Mayne essays not too interesting, but given his range he should offer something of value to every kind of reader. There's an easy sensuality to much of Mayne's verse. Sometimes, it's too easy, emerging in conventional praises for the figure of the woman, falling into a laxity of statement which lacks energy. In poems like "Bocce", however, it leads to a precision of description that is sure and evocative. "Division", a poem on a Moore sculpture, is also notable for its sharp, concrete imagery. Indeed, there are a number of interesting travel poems, historical/philosophical meditations brought on by monuments of one kind or another. Mayne's poems to and about certain named individuals have an immediacy I don't find in most of the 'love' poems to an unnamed lover. "Raizel", "Chaim", and "Menashah" are the best of these poems, but all are interesting. All in all, I find *Name* to be the best book Mayne has yet published.

Michael Yates's *Breath of the Snow Leopard* has one of the best titles going; it reveals an obsession with the limits of (and limitations imposed by) space and time. "Unlike time, space is dangerous", however, for "it will come for me in its own black time." Out of this obsession, Yates builds huge aerie edifices of words on the insubstantial sands of nowhere and nowhen. In many cases, this insubstantiality is too much a part of the poem, but when, as in "driving", the metaphysics of Yates's obsession is grounded in the real landscape which surrounds him, the result is exciting poetry. Yates takes almost too much delight in paradoxes, which leads him to fabricate a few too many occasionally. In such cases genuine wit gives way to a forced surrealistic sarcasm which I find pretentious. The essential flavour of these poems is that of a cool, observant, and linguistically fertile, intellection. The poems are hard tiles, gleaming coldly on the page. The author dazzles from behind his masks, but we seldom feel we've seen him. The poems which work best, therefore, are those which nakedly display their philosophical bases. "Timesmiths in Space" is such a sequence, a metapoem of sorts which engage us directly through its stringent meditational stance. As well, the three poems of "Death Suite", because they engage that final black space and its power over people the poet knows, are resonant testaments to his struggle to keep the word alive. I suspect Michael Yates's poetry is for specific tastes only. Of its kind, cold, intellectual, linguistically rich, it

is very good, and *Breath of the Snow Leopard* contains some exciting examples of it.

Derk Wynand's *Snowscapes* is the second book of the past few years to engage the Canadian winter landscape as a philosophical/psychological presence in our lives. It does so through a series of subtly interlocked lyrics and prose pieces, culminating in a radio play for six voices at the end. For Wynand, snowscapes invoke abstraction: the lyrics and prose pieces tend to be written on a level of generalization which keeps everything determinedly impersonal. There is an almost scientific detachment to the descriptions which has its own cool power. "Whatever happens here/happens when it is snowing." Somewhere, inner or outer, the snow falls, and the poem occurs. In the lyrics, the snow slowly becomes an omni-presence, ordering all experience. In many of the prose pieces, well-wrought little scenes of absurdist comedy, it also takes over the minds of the characters. Throughout, an ironic and wistful wit plays across the lines and sentences, providing an almost surrealistic sense of a landscape lurking in snow. The *idea* of snow, providing a metaphoric measure of all occurrences the poems make note of, appears to be the focus of the poet's interest. Towards the end, a new voice appears to question the validity of what the earlier pieces have said. All is brought together in the final, comic confrontation between alternate versions of snow-events articulated in the radio-play. Snowy ambiguity reigns supreme here, as the six voices argue the truth of various perceptions. Are there special symbolic meanings to what we have read, or is it all just a genuine exploration of nothing more than snowscapes? Finally, all that can be said is the final line of the book: "Real snow in a genuine wind." The journey to that statement is a provocative and entertaining one.

In her third book, the somewhat sumptuously designed *The Custodian of Chaos*, Marg Yeo achieves a strong, individual voice, a voice whose wry twists, quick turns of logic and illogic, swoops and yells, compel attention. Even the weaker poems of this collection belong here, for we always hear Yeo speaking. In "Isadora", Yeo says, "there is no/history in women" but this poem, like many of the others, argues a transhistorical feminine presence of great power. Yeo seeks that presence in ancient and popular mythology, collating an essential woman who can speak to lovers, friends, readers, with an assured sense of being here, even if she's also on the defensive. Not too much on the defensive, however: Yeo's speakers are fighters, they are active in the worlds of these poems.

Love is an important constant in these poems. Dangerous, it nevertheless represents life. "Her various lover" moves with speed and energy through different scenes of rough communion. Occasionally a brilliant phrase like "your hands/taking up their unfamiliar/drift along my spine", where "drift", so apt, focuses attention, catches the eye. Yeo has a strong and ready sense of the comic, as her mixed myths reveal. The energy of her poems often emerges from the collision of 'high' and 'low' myth, and 'low' myth, Bluebeard or the wolfman, usually has the advantage. Persephone is thoroughly Canadian in the poem of that title. In a world where order is becoming too strong, too repressive, canceling out the rich variety of life, chaos is a positive presence. *The Custodian of Chaos* sings its praises of people and

events which preserve the rough anarchy of people living themselves freely, and does so with verve and humour. Susan Porter O'Shea has contributed a number of evocative illustrations.

Oberon Press continues its recovery of Raymond Souster's *oeuvre* with the publication of *Double Header*, made up of *As Is* (1967) and *lost & found* (1968). This is an admirable enterprise, and the collection is to be recommended to all interested parties. Like all Souster collections, *Double Header* contains gems and coal dust. Souster's poetic was firmly established early in his career: every collection confirms his position in Canadian letters while offering examples of both his successes and his failures. When it appeared in 1967, *As Is* was noticed partly because it contained a number of new and (for Souster) quite long poems. *lost and found* was especially welcome because it brought to light many previously uncollected poems. As even Souster's books of the late 60s seem not to have reached a wide audience, Oberon's reprint should bring such delicately perfect poems as "Weeping Willow" to the wider audience Souster has surely earned in his 35 years of writing:

Nowhere a more
unabashed surrender
to sun and wind.

Response to air delicate
as any tinkling
shivering Chinese glass.

The stretching out
of a thousand fingers
to clutch the sun's
elusive ball of gold.

Roots reaching down
into their own
seven cities of beginning.

Using the plates of New Press's superb 1972 *Poems*, Press Porcepic brings us James Reaney's *Selected Shorter Poems* in paperback (I think there's a *Selected Longer Poems*, too, but I did not receive a review copy). This book, edited and introduced by Germaine Warkentin, is aimed especially at students, and will, I hope, find a place in some of the many courses on Canadian literature now extant. Reaney is, indeed, one of our major poets, and not simply for the poems of *The Red Heart*. He has pursued his vision and created his visionary worlds for over 30 years now, fashioning a unique corpus of poems. This selection is catholic and sure, ranging from pre-*Red Heart* poems such as "The Gramophone" to the marvelous late 60s emblem poems "Egypt" and "The Tree", and touching all the poetic bases Reaney has run between. James Reaney is one of the most important contemporary proponents of 'trad' poetry in Canada, yet he has always been an experimenter and innovator as well. As bp Nichol said so well: "reaney once called Bissett a one man civilization the same could be said of Reaney". *Selected Shorter Poems* offers convincing proof of that assertion.

A Knight in Dried Plums charts David McFadden's continuing verbal raids on the extraordinary ordinary. If you have enjoyed previous McFadden forays, you will enjoy this one. If you have yet to read a McFadden poem, be warned: the man is charming, comic, strangely affecting when you least expect it, and his poems defy all ordinary modes of classification. Actually, I don't know how McFadden gets away with it: lines, stanzas, even whole poems that shouldn't work, but do. His imagination is rooted in 'normal' living, but it moves far and fast and slippery in just about every piece he writes, touching lightly on a hundred arcane themes and always returning to this nice, ordinary guy with the weird thoughts, David McFadden of Hamilton, Ontario. I would say the poems in this new book are more obviously concerned than earlier ones with the ravages of time, violence and the prospect of death, but these too are a part of everyday life in Hamilton, and so fit right in to his genially explosive poetic universe. There are a number of sly fantasies and dreamvisions here, some moving portraits of people seen and known around the city, and some lengthy surreal philosophic excursions. Personally, I like David McFadden's poems: they appear rather unassuming, it's true, but they are gritty, emotionally real, and they are thoroughly entertaining as well.

Rona Murray's *Selected Poems* represents a substantial body of work in a suitably permanent setting. It contains her three major poem-sequences, *The Enchanted Adder* (1965), *The Power of the Dog* (1968) and *Ootischenie* (1974), plus a selection of shorter poems. Both *The Enchanted Adder* and *The Power of the Dog* are capable modernist poems; they are heavily allusive and symbolic, and obviously emerge from a powerful intelligence. Nevertheless, I must confess to finding them ponderous, and often stultifying in their deliberate reaching for profundity. In the shorter poems, especially "Reaction to a Cathedral Town" and "Houseboat C", there is a sense of lively engagement with the surrounding world which is refreshing after all the Eliotian solemnity of statement in the two long poems.

Ootischenie is another matter, however, a marvelously complex and alive exploration of the personal present and historical past of this Doukhobor village in the West Kootenays region of B.C. In this sequence I would say that Ms Murray moves towards a post-modernist exploration of her materials that insists upon the vital engagement of poet and experience. All of which makes *Ootischenie* certainly her most dynamic and powerfully involving poem. Rona Murray's *Selected Poems* is a representative culling of the work of an always intelligent and sometimes genuinely entertaining poet. As such, it recommends itself to all serious readers of Canadian poetry.

Douglas Lochhead is a poet of the commonplace, but no commonplace poet, and *Collected Poems: The Full Furnace* is therefore an entertaining journey through a life, with a mind moving on the river of time fully awake. There are a few poems to W.C. Williams here, and like the good doctor or "a full-back/in a flush of flowers,/startled by a rose, a rose", Lochhead is in love with the ephemera of life, all lives, and notes their unruly presence with a loving eye. "I want all the scraps I can get", he says, keeping his wry vision clearly poised on the impertinent facts.

For such a poet, bathos is often nearby. Like Raymond Souster, another poet of the everyday, Lochhead often returns with nothing more than scraps. When he's on,

however, he returns with scrappy poems which can rivet your attention. I find the lengthy "October Diary" especially interesting because it so catches the mind's and heart's *process* of engaging the poet's surrounding world, his home, his ancestors, his family, wife and daughters. Many of his outdoor poems reveal a sensitivity to natural detail which helps to explain the title's obvious reference to Lampman.

The poet speaks often of love, and he gives it substantial contextual presence in most of the poems. But then, as he says in "Disguises", "I translate it/that way", meaning the world, the universe, meaning the strangeness he finally, despite death and all, takes joyfully. *Collected Poems: The Full Furnace* is not a book to knock you head over heels. It's a book to rummage through, to savour slowly. When you are through, I think you will be happy that you have made the acquaintance of a "gentle writer" who is tough yet generous, and full of love for the world; who is, therefore, genuinely worth knowing. Because I like the poetry, and because the poetry is so specifically the speech of a man, I like the man who made it, too.

It's always difficult to follow a first-rate book, and I'm not sure that Joe Rosenblatt's *Virgins & Vampires* isn't something of a falling off from last year's superb *Dream Craters*. *Virgins & Vampires* is good Rosenblatt, however, as perverse and haunting and occasionally wickedly funny as we have come to expect his work to be. *Virgins & Vampires* is a cook's tour of the Rosenblatt bestiary; which is also an infirmary, for the world is sick, almost unto death. Neither the small pond, with its sex-mad frogs, nor the ocean with its whales, "sardines/of the cosmos", is safe; vegetables, animals and men are all in trouble when "history becomes an assassin, water/a quick suicide". Even the poet has his problems; air and metaphors are rotten, the poem a cadaver. As one progresses through the book, it becomes obvious that Rosenblatt is constructing a poetic ecology of sorts in which the act of poetry is connected to the fetid life of the animal kingdom in a variety of esoteric ways. Political and economic phrases (Rosenblatt knows his Marxes, Karl and Groucho both) act as the cement in this construction.

Virgins & Vampires contains a number of Rosenblatt's freaky drawings, which only add to the general hot-house atmosphere of the book. The general tenor is bleak: not only is the world sick, there is a general dearth of doctors. Yet imagination continues to thrive, even in the midst of rot. Humour does, too. Anyone who can join "Stars, Poets, & Nymphets" as Rosenblatt does in the poem of that title, hasn't given up all hope yet:

The gangster of poetic hybrid sprouts
green buds of lies to college girls.

Plying them with drinks in the faculty club,
his wide eyes puddle their contours & crevices.
The nymphets offer the poet a collective love poem.

His hotel room changes quietly into a dromedary
to slip away into the sunset of lost opportunity.

Overhead, stars like beaming kittens
fall on the bed of a blue movie
to meow their anonymity.

Christopher Dewdney's first book, the unusual — and generally unnoticed — *A Palaeozoic Geology of London Ontario* (Coach House, 1973), is a collection of poems and collages which both explore the geological nature of southwestern Ontario and propose what might be called a geology of the human mind. Thus section titles like "The Memory Table" and diagrams and statements connecting this to the water table in the earth's surface. Of course, the whole concept of fossilization was investigated in relation to the concept of memory. *A Palaeozoic Geology* is an often difficult, even intellectually opaque, book, but there can be no doubt of the wit, intelligence and talent of its author. All of which can be found in Dewdney's second book, *Fovea Centralis*, a collection of poems, prose pieces and collage-drawings which offer a strange, sf vision of man through a variety of experiments in techniques and tone. Once again, much of the writing makes large, even occasionally exasperating, demands of the reader, yet the rewards are great. Something out of the ordinary is happening here, and as you read it happens to you.

Dewdney is one of the first poets I know to use the language of modern science purely poetically. He is very much a modern scientist, too, phenomenological, post-Einsteinian, aware, as he puts it, that "perception is mostly inference", for "this particular landscape implicates you." I suspect much of his poetic can be deduced from these statements. Certainly, his careful, and often witty, even comic, use of a variety of scientific terminologies is one reason I connect his work to the best recent sf.

Fovea Centralis is divided into a number of sections. In "The Parenthetical", Dewdney uses various forms of parenthetical discourse to interrupt and utterly fragment certain seemingly plain statements. His comic sensibilities are given free rein here. In the poems of the first section, "Excerpts from the Journal of a Prisoner in the T'ang Dynasty", he first mentions the *idea* of 'Remote Control' which is the focus of a frighteningly oppressive exploration of technological nightmare in the section of that title. Dewdney uses a marvelously flat, scientific tone to demonstrate that if we are Remote Controlled only paranoia can recognize this; and it can't save us. This is Orwell up-to-date, and it's brilliantly done.

Yet, I must admit that I find the poems of the first section the most enjoyable and intriguing works in the book. I think Dewdney's real growth in power and in clarity of expression since *A Palaeozoic Geology* is best revealed in these poems, especially the series called "Opium" and some of the poems titled "Poem", where a more personal voice appears than before. These are difficult and often arcane poems, but they exert a true fascination upon me. "That night at Lake Huron" is a good example of Dewdney's work, his original use of language and his personal vision:

Emerald the Leaves curled
& flattened like cat-ears in terror
as the stars' strange applause
wended its fox-fire passage over the beach.
Meteors inscribed long thin needles of white
across a carbon-blue midnight sky

and in the eye of each of these needles
 a star winked through the heat.
 Thin silver bracelets of constellations
 posed against the endless & savage recession of space.

In the warm nervous system of the lake
 distant shoals of fish rose glittering
 to the surface. Immersed &
 inside the areola of summer darkness
 we fused in the natural grace of our moving.
 (our knowledge terrible & flickering
 in retinal heat-lightning on the horizon &
 over our phospheme faces)
 Feeling the dance of Aurora in our transparent flesh.
 Heat-wave.

Solar wind blowing through the
 empty flutes of stellar love.

The music your hair makes.

In an exciting departure for a reprint operation, the PaperJacks division of General Publishing Company has brought out *Horse d'Oeuvres*, an original anthology by the members of the extraordinary sound-poetry collective, The Four Horsemen. Since Rafael Barreto-Rivera, Paul Dutton, Steve McCaffery and bp Nichol come from widely different backgrounds and have strongly individual personalities and poetic visions, it is a rich and varied collection.

"Jose in Exile" by Rafael Barreto-Rivera leans heavily on the exotic influences of his Puerto Rican inheritance throughout. Cities from all over the Americas haunt the landscapes of these poems, but behind them all is "the ancient Spanish city/of my speech." Many of the poems are erotically and sensuously evocative; at least one, "Littoral", tautly expands the pun of its title into an exploration of the poetic process. In all of them a sophisticated and complex intelligence explores a wide range of events.

Paul Dutton's "Partial 2" ranges from pure 'trad' poetry to concrete word-games arranged with great visual precision on the page. Dutton uses language carefully and concisely, often turning his poems on the most serious punning, as when he subjects the line, "This is a poem for my father's gravestone", to a series of verbal permutations which lead one ever deeper into love and sorrow. In "January 25 or 26", he too explores the poetic process, using puns and arcane rhymes to examine the difficulties of making poems and/or love.

Steve McCaffery's "The Savage Piano" is divided in two parts, of which the first is a series of carefully articulated 'images', metamorphoses of other sensed activities. They are rich in suggestive implications. Their bare-bones style serves to emphasize the dream-like synaesthesia of what they *say* is happening. Strong stuff. Part 2 is a more obviously experimental exploration of language's border-areas. These poems are difficult and often obscure compared with those of Part 1, but they reveal the same careful craftsmanship and concern for language.

"Names" demonstrates what causes a growing number of critics to consider bp Nichol perhaps the most important poet of his generation. Difficult, sometimes obscure, often rich in humour and pain, and intricate in their loving sensitivity, these pieces cover a wide range of styles and experiences. Nichol's ability to express passionate understanding and emotional involvement without any *apparent* rhetorical architecture is shown in the incredible free-prose piece, "some description of her", which alone makes this book a winner. It is utterly personal, yet the emotional changes its utterance charts achieve universal resonances. It becomes some description of us for any readers willing to join in the difficult search for personal knowledge the poem articulates. As well, "the brown books: a play" plays on the words of Wittgenstein, "juliet a novel juliet" makes witty changes on fictional 'reality', and "sun/day/ease" elucidates Nichol's continuing concern with the alphabet and with speech that reaches out to touch others. All these works work with love; all are impressive creations.

At the price, and given the value and range of materials it contains, *Horse d'Oeuvres* has to be the biggest bargain we'll see in poetry books for quite a while. I hope it can sell well enough to encourage PaperJacks to look into the possibility of other inexpensive reprints or original anthologies.

I've been taking delight in the work of Gwendolyn MacEwen since I first found *The Rising Fire* in the old storeroom of the *Dalhousie Review* in 1964. She is a wonder, a phenomenological mythicist, a poet of legendary process — how everyday *becomes* supernatural reality. *Magic Animals: Selected Poems Old and New* provides a welcome chance to become reacquainted with the best poems of her earlier books — for a change, I agree with almost all the selections — and to discover a group of new poems in which the poet explores the animal and vegetable kingdoms, and the somewhat ambiguous glory of god, providing, by the by, some witty and acute visions of man in the middle.

Frank Davey has pointed out how Gwen MacEwen's use of myth — unlike, say, A.J.M. Smith's — is kinetic, very much an organic process in each poem. As well, she has a powerful command of tone, an ability to create mesmerizing patterns of sound and rhythm which make her best poems truly enchanting. What is not always mentioned, however, is her sly, feline sense of humour. Much of MacEwen's work is celebration, and celebration of her universe is a matter of cosmic laughter as often as not.

There are many poems in this collection I have returned to with delight over the years. A number of the new poems will join them. Here MacEwen engages god and 'reality & dream', and she comes to god as an equal, ready to do battle. The energy of the enterprise rattles through the poems, throwing sparks everywhichway.

"The Rodeo"

Let me ride you, Lord,
Horse of the storms,
Let me ride you out!

You buck and swell

Beneath me, and I swear
I will not fall.

I've ridden the horses
Of heaven. I've been
Through other rodeos than this.

Lord, I think you are a pony.
I've broken beasts
More wild than you.

If you're missing any one of *A Breakfast for Barbarians*, *The Shadow Maker* or *The Armies of the Moon*, you should get this book. If you've somehow missed Gwen MacEwen's poems entirely, you have to get this book. If you can enjoy a poetry both sensual and sly, erotic and mythological, witty and occasionally savage in its assaults upon the human heart and mind, you'll *want* to get this book. *Magic Animals* is a rich and energetic testament to a career in full stride. We can look to read much more from MacEwen in the future.

Certainly one of the major publications of the past few years is the beautifully produced *The Collected Poems of Earle Birney*, as fitting a homage to an important career as one could hope for, and thus the book to bring this review to a proper close. This boxed set of two superbly printed volumes is everything a *Collected Poems* should be, as the slovenly-produced *Collected* Layton of a few years ago was not. Perhaps I reveal my bias too strongly when I say Birney richly deserves this collection.

A simple list of the section titles reveals once and for all the vast range of Birney's poetry: 1920-1938: Canada; 1928-1968: U.S.A.; 1934-1958: North Pacific; 1938-1947: War; 1941-1958: Canada; 1953-1971: Europe; 1955-1962: Mexico; 1958-1972: Asia; 1959-1965: Canada; 1962: South America and the Caribbean; 1968: Australia & New Zealand; 1968-1969: South Pacific; 1965-1974: Canada. Not only do these headings show us just how great a globe-trotting poet Birney has been (and *is*: as the book went to press in the fall of 1974, he embarked on another round-the-world jaunt), but they reveal as well how long he has been writing and revising his poems. A never-ending adventure for the poet as well as the reader, this poetic life; or so Birney's career informs us.

In his Foreword, Birney supplies the following statistics: "Of these 223 makings and 5 translations, 4 are printed for the first time, 18 have appeared only in periodicals, and the remainder were published in earlier books." Note the term 'makings': Birney is very clear on this point, and with such a career-spanning collection — lacking only the ornately wrought play for voices, "The Damnation of Vancouver" — he proves he has earned the name of 'makar'.

In reading through *The Collected Poems* one discovers not merely continual and ever further exploration of the resources of language but continual and further extension of personal resources, of the mind and heart. There is a deep cosmic pessimism which runs like a dark thread through the glitter of Birney's carefully crafted poems. Alongside it, however, runs a ripe green band of life and love. The poems contain all that, plus the lessons of making only an always open and growing poet can know. This is a book no serious student nor dedicated amateur can afford to ignore.

THE BOOKS: IN ORDER:

- Elizabeth McLuhan. *Routes/Roots*. Toronto: Griffin House, 1974. Pp. 64. \$3.95.
- Don Coles. *Sometimes All Over*. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1975. Pp. 89. \$5.95.
- Phyllis Gotlieb. *Doctor Umlaut's Earthly Kingdom*. Toronto: Calliope Press, 1974. Pp. 106. \$2.95.
- Don Gutteridge. *Borderlands*. Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1975. np. \$3.95.
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