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Review Article

Canadian Poetry Chronicle: VI

I'll begin this installment with a couple of anthologies. After that, the deluge as usual.

*Many Voices: An Anthology of Canadian Indian Poetry*¹ is an important book with great flaws. Editors David Day and Marilyn Bowering insist that they 'have selected the poems on the basis of merit and "voice" alone and have not wished to shape a social statement. The poems speak for themselves.' But, despite the protests, this book *is* a social statement, and part of what it states is that Indian poetry, as yet, needs to be published separately. Moreover, the 'merit' varies considerably among the contributors. I wish they had chosen fewer contributors and more contributions from writers like Skyros Bruce, Gordon Williams, Cam Hubert, Susan Landell, Edward John, and a few others. Interestingly, most of those named do have longer sections than the rest, but they are also the most interesting poets. The recorded 'spoken poems' of some older Indians are fascinating as well, but in a different way. The one thing I really missed, and perhaps younger Indian poets just aren't doing it, is the chant poem. *Many Voices* is a worthwhile book because it allows us to hear some important native voices beginning to speak strongly at last. What we should be looking forward to, however, is the day when good Indian poets, like the ones mentioned above, will appear in some new anthology of Canadian or North American poetry that covers the whole spectrum of good writing without regard to racial origins.

Dorothy Livesay's *Right Hand Left Hand*² is not a book of poetry, though there are many of her poems in it. Its subtitle indicates the true scope of this remarkable book: 'A True Life of the Thirties: Paris, Toronto, Montreal, the West and Vancouver. Love, Politics, the Depression and Feminism.' Indeed. This huge melange of letters, articles, essays, news reports, author's present-day commentary, poems and footnotes is both an exciting look from one person's perspective at all the subjects mentioned above and a somewhat disappointingly unorganized mass of material for a true memoir which may now never be written. On the other hand, the juxtaposition of various impermeable ideals and concepts in the book may best represent their turbulent presence in Livesay's life during those years. At any rate, with all its faults it is a necessary book for anyone interested in Dorothy Livesay or in the politics and poetry of the period. As well, it's often exciting and moving reading.

*The Circular Dark*³ is apparently Pier Giorgio Di Cicco's fourth collection of poems, though it's the first I've seen. It is a book of a young writer too much in love with both the Romantic ideal of poetry and the romantic idea of himself as poet. Thus, though there's no doubt he has a certain flair with language and with various tropes, too many of these poems are self-serving in a morally offensive fashion. Part I reveals one of his major faults: his superior stance vis-à-vis the people of whom he writes. His tone and approach continually reveal a scorn barely veneered with descriptive sentiment or 'Honest perceptions.' Thus he often lets a poem go on longer than it should. This is even true of such a humorous poem as 'A Man with Three Legs,' which appears to end perfectly at the bottom of page 5, but continues, alas, for 3 unnecessary lines on page 6. When he plays the Romantic lover-poet, too, his ego takes up too much of the poem's space. The poet's personal presence is better accounted for in the poems on his family, but his tendency to explain what he has already shown needs to be held in check. In *The Circular Dark*, Di Cicco tries a number of poems on poetry and again betrays poetry with his egoizing. Di Cicco is a lyric poet of the modernist (or even premodernist) stamp; as such he has the potential talent to write some fine Romantic poems in the lyric mode. To do so, however, he will have to learn a greater humility before his subjects and his art. If he can do this, we can expect some interesting poetry from him in the future (I know I risk being accused of the very superior tone I find in Di Cicco; this may be true but I can only say that my basic response to his poems was to that tone).

What can I say about the latest version of A.J.M. Smith's *Selected Poems, The Classic Shade*?⁴ That I don't think there are more than three poems not in his 1967 *Collected Poems*? That if you don't have a Smith collection and you're a student of 20th-century Canadian poetry, you had better get it? As his title suggests, Smith's muse is classic, hieratic, difficult and austere. He excels at the kind of poetry associated with the followers of Eliot and Yeats in the 30s and 40s. If I am not terribly excited by such poetry, if I don't find it compelling me as the most exciting contemporary poetry does (or even that of Eliot and Yeats), that is perhaps more a comment on my taste than on the value of Smith's verses. *The Classic Shade* is a fine representative selection of Smith's poems and it sports a lengthy, critical appreciation by M.L. Rosenthal; it is a necessary book for anyone interested in early modernism in Canada.

Fred Cogswell's Fiddlehead Books moves towards the 250 mark (!) with a group of recently published volumes. As he has so often done in the past, Cogswell continues to publish new poets as well as better known ones. What is striking about almost all the poetry one sees in print today is the general level of competence it achieves. A case in point is Lawrence Mathew's first book, *The Sweet Tears of the Judge*.⁵ This is all readable stuff, yet the absence of a unique voice or a real need to speak renders it all rather bland. Insofar as it does hold my attention, it does so for its ideas, rather than for its language, rhythms or emotional complexities. Mathew's most interesting poems are little nightmare fables, which would probably work better in a slightly expanded prose format.

Kathleen McCracken is just sixteen years old, but the poems of *Reflections*⁶ reflect a maturity of craft and vision which belie her youth. Oh, these poems contain all the flaws associated with apprentice work, like the abstract phrases beginning with 'of' in 'Profit and Loss' or the overuse of one-word lines, but what emerges from a reading of the whole book is the sense of a highly articulate, well-read, perceptive writer willing to engage life through language at any cost. *Reflections* is not a great book; in many ways it's not even a good one, but it exudes real promise. If McCracken remains true to her muse and her craft, it will one day be seen as the precocious announcement of a new and powerful voice.

*Hungry Leaves*⁷, Peter Giesbrecht's first book, would have made a stronger impression on me had editing pruned it somewhat. A student of Stanley Cooperman, Robert Bringhurst and J. Michael Yates, Giesbrecht often attempts a philosophical and austere poetry like that of the latter two, but he's seldom as successful as they are. Possibly this is because he only uses natural events to highlight inner experiences and not, as well, for themselves. He seldom seems to see the world for itself but only for what it lets him say about himself. Occasionally, as in 'Spiral' and 'Sonambulist,' he makes a truly witty analogy carry a whole poem, and I wonder if he shouldn't pursue comedy more often. 'Ships' reveals a sensitive ear, though other poems and lines like 'We sailed our hazard ship / In moonlight sailing suns' suggest to me that he can be rather insensitive as well.

*Tenth Muse*⁸ appears to be a gathering of Luella Kerr's poems of the past seven years or so. What I like about Kerr's poetry is the constant note of human celebration of the world as it surrounds us now. I find, however, that too often, as in the long 'Prince Edward Island' or 'Excerpts from *A Log for Lovers*,' she expresses this attitude in a prosaic form more suited to a light essay, which is essentially what 'Prince Edward Island' is. Too many of these poems lack the fire and rhythmic music Kerr obviously seeks to achieve. Ironically, therefore, the finest poems in the book are the six 'Sonnets in memory of John Keats,' where the traditional control of the form focuses her language far more forcefully than elsewhere in the book.

Mary Willis engages the world through metaphor, and it lives for her in the metamorphoses that trope continually proposes. *Under This World's Green Arches*⁹ is most satisfying when she adopts a more-or-less mythological relationship to the life about her, whether it be the life of nature or the life of her family and friends. Not all these poems are successful. Some seem to be trying too hard for emotional effect, some overdo their Romantic egoism, and occasionally the poet slips into weak similes or phrases like 'seasons of desire.' At her best, however, as in 'Love's Storm,' where phrases like 'Always the teeth,/ granite teeth in the earth,/in a red earth of flesh,' wed concepts and emotions into a powerful unit, Willis achieves an energetic natural communion with the cycles of life she observes. The poems are enhanced by the sensual illustrations the author's sister, Elizabeth Willis, contributed to the book.

The thing to understand about Ted Plantos is that he's an unreconstructed Romantic, as *The Light Is On My Shoulder*¹⁰ once again demonstrates. Although all the usual faults of Plantos's poetry are present, all the best aspects of it are here as well. Indeed, this is one of his best collections, due in part no doubt to the ironic humour he often allows to play across his little vignettes. One of the best pieces here is 'For a Hobo,' 'found in conversation' and vividly realistic in its presentation of romantic nostalgia for a hard and ugly life. The poems for Byron and Wordsworth interestingly reflect Plantos's awareness of his Romantic background, while the poems on specific incidents in England have a sense of the real like that of the hobo poem. Plantos sometimes revels in Romantic emotionalism to excess, but in the best poems of this book he achieves a balanced tension of emotion and awareness that is refreshingly honest and occasionally laced with tough laughter.

Jacqueline d'Amboise is an interesting young poet with an obvious love of language and mythology, but many of the poems in *Mother Myths*,¹¹ her first book, fail through an overabundance of uncontrolled language. These are mostly poems of love, lost and found, inhabiting a territory spanning ancient mythology and contemporary technology, but too often they never get beyond the language-game stage. It is, I suppose, a question of tone and control, both of which come only with time and practice. Possibly the real problem here is size: properly edited to about half its present length, this book would make a far stronger impression. D'Amboise's best poems tend to be stripped down in comparison to the weaker ones; they also tend to be more clearly imbedded in real experience, though I took great pleasure in the wittily organized, lengthy found poem, 'The 214 Kang Hsi,' where simple play with the words leads to a strangely satisfying result. Many of these poems present the woman as victim, yet she also emerges as a survivor. That's how I see d'Amboise; I think she can become a truly interesting poet if she learns to control her oftentimes falsely surreal imagery and to focus her energies in tight taut poems like 'Tribal Touch' and 'Beach Poem,' two of her best.

Roo Borson's first book, *Landfall*,¹² is broken into two sections, 'Migrations' and 'Landfall.' Borson articulates a sharp and often frightening alienation in the poems of 'Migrations': 'Your breathing is no comfort,' she says, or 'Making love to you/is like turning/in a crowded room/and finding no one.' Yet by the end of the lengthy 'Migrations' some hope is expressed: 'Piece by piece/my body is returning.' When, in 'This Much,' the moon rises 'like the barrel of a gun,' the essential, terrifying alienation is still in force. 'Landfall' contains a number of mostly short, enigmatic poems. Borson reveals a strong imagistic sense and, on the whole, handles rhythm and sound well. If the overall tone of her book is bleak, the energy of her craft argues against utter pessimism and makes of *Landfall* a strong first book.

Kim Maltman's *The Country of the Mapmakers*¹³ speaks, like Roo Borson's *Landfall*, of personal alienation and the destruction of love (which makes their mutual dedications interesting). Many of the poems are thematically and in-

tellectually interesting yet have all the passion of a scientific report. In the section titled 'The Changeling,' however, Maltman creates a series of confrontation poems where the persona speaks directly to the lost other; the language is concrete, the images sharp and the sense of a human voice speaking in pain is clear. A number of darkly comic excursions into sf, theology and literary criticism show Maltman to be a capable ironist when aroused, while the title poem is an example of an intellectual conceit passionately worked out. Maltman has genuine talent, and when emotionally engaged, as in 'The Changeling,' is capable of gripping poems.

*Twenty-Five*¹⁴ is George McWhirter's South America book, a collection of poems engendered by his travels there. McWhirter is an accomplished writer and the many modes he employs here provide a variety of perspective on the place, its people and the poet observing. On the whole this is an entertaining collection. There are sharply wrought images, some careful social observation and some wicked comedy. McWhirter has not only watched the people in these places, he has listened to them. As a result, his best work here has an authenticity which can only be admired.

*The Bogman Pavese Tactics*¹⁵ is possibly Peter Stevens's best book to date. Two of its four sections, anyway, contain some of his finest work, while the poems in the other two parts, especially a few of the sf 'Shock Tactics' poems, don't fall too far below the standard he sets in 'Bogman' and, especially, 'The Pavese Poems.' Essentially, Stevens is a commendably competent poet, whose work reveals his long study of 20th-century poetry. Often, however, he fails to ignite his poems so they can soar beyond that competence. In both 'Bogman' and 'The Pavese Poems,' he has found subjects which demand more than usual from him. 'Bogman' stumbles occasionally in its efforts to enact an ancient mythic rite, but there is real power in its best bits. Cezar Pavese's career 'is almost archetypically modern,' says Stevens, and so the alienation which energized Pavese's life also energizes Stevens's poems about him. What is best about these poems is the often starkly and darkly comic tone of despair which Stevens captures for his archetypal figure. 'Pavese' speaks in the best of these poems directly to us; and what he says demands our attention.

Stephen Scriver's first book, *Between the Lines*,¹⁶ is lots of fun, a book of hockey poems which captures the feelings of the folks who play on minor league teams in places like Grenfell, Saskatchewan. It's light but well done. Scriver's book is a good example of one particular line of poetry which seems to be emerging on the prairies today. Like Glen Sorestad's *Prairie Pub Poems*, *Between the Lines* pretty well eschews most of the modes of even 20th-century verse in an attempt to capture the speech of the people it represents. A good half of these poems are monologues, but monologues in which taut rhythm, verbal dexterity and poetic tropes are ignored in the effort to make the 'speech' of the characters authentic. In many ways, this particular attempt is better suited to prose, like the novels of Robert Kroetsch, but when the subject can be covered sufficiently in a sequence of poems, it works there too. It mostly works for

Scriver, failing only when he tries for too 'poetic' an allusion or effect. These are deliberately 'primitive' poems, but Scriver's deliberateness (and his refusal to try for a form akin to that of 'Dangerous Dan McGrew,' say) is an authentic act of artifice. And, as I said above, it's good fun, especially if you like hockey. The sweat and the swearing, the joy in winning and swapping stories over beer, the whole real jock escapism of it, all this Scriver has captured, and if he refuses to criticize it, even by implication, well why should he; it's obvious he loves the game too much.

Like Stephen Scriver, Lorne Daniel is seeking an authentic prairie, or western, speech in his poems, and like Scriver he often achieves an articulation better suited to prose. If Scriver has at least the specific subject of semi-pro hockey to hold his book together, Daniel has little more than his own sensitivity to the land and the people he loves to unify the various poems in *Towards a New Compass*.¹⁷ At his best, Daniel achieves an imagistic description of prairie landscapes and the effects of weather that is immediately engaging. His poems on sitting around with his friends, watching his family grow or working on various gardens he's had over the past few years, seldom transcend the limitations of the personal essay, however, and the few occasions when he tries to achieve some kind of philosophical statement about life, like 'Life Dance,' are utterly lacking in poetic energy. Daniel's little essays in personal growth and feeling aren't bad poems, they simply aren't examples of a unique poetic sensibility. On the whole, though I like the person who emerges in *Towards a New Compass*, I can't say I'm drawn by his voice, as I am, say, by John Newlove's fascinatingly subtle language.

Howlcat Fugues,¹⁸ John Tyndall's first book, is precocious in both good and bad ways. Tyndall is obviously in love with words; he is dazzled by their infinite variety and seeks to dazzle us in turn. Alas, he does not always succeed; too many of the poems in 'the Lion real and nothing the Lizard' fail to cohere for me, for all the surreal energy of individual lines. 'Orange Journeys,' a rhyming poem, at least moves naturally from beginning to end, despite some banalities along the way. Most of the poems after it appears somehow more coherent; the moods they seek to frame are present, the weird juxtapositions work. In 'Apocalypso,' the second part, things rapidly improve. Most of these poems honour rock 'n' roll stars, the late Jimi Hendrix and Jim Morrison and the very live Rolling Stones in concert. Here Tyndall finds in his inspirations the jagged rhythms and tonal excitement he so often failed to achieve earlier. These poems *move* and excite a response in the reader. Throughout, the collages of Mike Hannay provide suitably surreal visual counterpoint to the poems. As a whole the book is the usual Applegarth Follies treat.

As is another first book, fittingly illustrated by Judith Klein Stenn, John B. Lee's *Poems Only a Dog Could Love*.¹⁹ Its first section, an elegy for his dog written in the dog's persona, 'Dog Elegies by Quiante edited by John B. Lee,' is certainly different and audacious. The problem, for me, is that Quiante is all too reminiscent of Pope's 'Dog of Kew,' a wit of all-too-human proportions.

Perhaps this is unavoidable; language is human, and even fictional animals who use language, who speak as Lee has Quiante speak here, must perforce become overly humanized. Nevertheless, a dog so full of purely human allusions, perceptions and delight in similes finally fails to create in me the necessary suspension of disbelief which would make her demise moving. There are a few poems toward the end of the sequence which in their simplicity of diction appear quite 'dog-like', but they are too late and too few to win my sympathetic connivance in Lee's fiction. Part 2, 'Doppelganger,' fares a bit better, although for a poet who talks so much about language as metaphor Lee is given overmuch to the much weaker simile. When he forgets to talk about poetry and begins to delight in the play of language for its own sake, I begin to have hope for his future poems. Lee is young and audacious (the *attempt* of Part 1 proves that); I think he has much to learn, but *Poems Only a Dog Could Love* indicates he has potential.

With *A True History of Lambton County*²⁰ Don Gutteridge has turned from public to private history, that is from figures like Riel and Hearne to his own ancestors and the people of the place where he was born. On the whole, I think it's a wise move, especially in so far as it allows him to speak in his own voice, a voice he tended to impose on those other, legendary, figures. Mind you, he still listens to those others; his 'True History' is littered with quotations from almost everyone who passed through the area, from Champlain through Major Richardson to Victor Lambton, author of *Lambton's 100 Years, 1849 - 1949*. Gutteridge brilliantly juxtaposes his extracts; but in his poems of reminiscence and conceptual exploration he tends to overuse the metaphor of the poem as something various citizens wrote with their lives and he often fails to achieve a truly arresting flow of language. He does better with a couple of 'persona' poems (his area of greatest weakness in *Borderlands* and *Tecumseh*), achieving his most moving effects in a pair of poems about his grandparents. (His occasional misuse of key words still bothers me, though: his grandmother's reference to her first son's mouth as 'a nozzle at my breast' is a good example; a nozzle doesn't suck, it is 'a projecting spout through which gas or liquid is discharged.') *A True History of Lambton County* is the second book of a projected tetralogy (the first volume was the novel, *Bus Ride*), so it appears Gutteridge has set himself another grandiose project. At the moment, simply because its smaller scale seems better suited to his talents, it emerges as a readable and genial work, though there is little here to excite the reader interested in poetic exploration.

As the introduction and biographical notes to *Montréal English Poetry in the Seventies*²¹ make clear, the past decade in that city has seen an upsurge of writing and small press publishing. Vehicule Press is but one of the many presses; of its recent publications the most generally valuable is this solid introduction to the contemporary English poetry scene in Montreal. Editors Andre Farkis and Ken Norris have done an admirable job of collecting a wide variety of poets and poems under one set of covers, and if an individual reader

may doubt the value of some of them he will nonetheless be forced to concede the value of the whole, which is high. Everybody will have favorites, so I'll just list mine. As readers of this continuing chronicle will know, I greatly admire Richard Sommer's work, so they won't be surprised if I say his selection is the standout. Claudia Lapp's happy, even humorous, eroticism is refreshing in its vitality. Andre Farkis and Artie Gold are also both funny and vital. Marc Plourde writes some powerful semi-narrative vignettes of street life. Ken Norris manages some witty and weirdly learned love poems. The rest of the poets range from good to very poor, while the poetry ranges from the strictly traditional to both sound and visual concrete. Farkis and Norris's Introduction is a bonus, explaining both the roots of the recent upsurge in George Bowering's creative writing classes at Sir George Williams and especially in the series of readings he organized while he lived there, and the importance of Montreal as a centre of English poetry in every decade since the 30s except the 60s. All in all, *Montréal English Poetry of the Seventies* is an enjoyable introduction to a number of interesting poets and an energetic, ongoing poetry scene which fully deserves the attention such an anthology calls to it.

Since he was an important catalyst for the seventies poetry scene in Montréal, it seems fitting that George Bowering should publish his lyrics from the period of his residence there with Véhicule Press. *The Concrete Island: Montréal Poems 1967 - 71*²² is just what its title says, a collection of fugitive lyrics from the period when Bowering was giving up the lyric mode to work in serial poems. *Genève* and most of *Autobiology* were written in Montreal, and one suspects from Bowering's Introduction that they represented an escape from the sense of placelessness he felt while living there. For Bowering, Montreal was a concrete island offering only negative possibilities for poetry; he contrasted it with Vancouver and found it wanting. He found Montreal wanting and found himself wanting to be elsewhere, and the desperation that is a function of such wanting infests these poems. Some of them are sharp, some harsh, some funny, some frightened—he was there during the student riots and the War Measures Act—but they share a sense of weary displacement, a sense of wanting to escape the concrete surround. Yet because Bowering is, at his best, a sensitive observer, this book offers perceptions of Montreal only an outsider could discover, and for that as well as for the craft of its best poems, it is worthwhile.

I'm not quite sure what to say about John McAuley's *Nothing Ever Happens in Pointe-Claire*,²³ a book I found delightful in places but decidedly lacking in weight. Containing a mixture of poems, beautiful xerox illustrations (by Robert Mellor), fake and real letters from editors and poets, and a monograph on chocolate laws, it is a very mixed bag indeed; and although aspects of that mixture gave me pleasure they did not add up to a convincing whole. I found 'political poem' a fine statement of poetic intent, yet the very real problems that it raised, even that of poetry as pure celebration, seldom issued in the poems that followed. McAuley's book is an intriguing introduction to a quirky poetic mind, and I hope he will find a more successful way to articulate that quirkiness more fully next time.

*Vegetables*²⁴ is a friendly little book, decked out with a package of seeds on its cover and containing poems by Ken Norris and drawings by Jill Smith. The drawings are subtle and finely crafted; the poems are . . . various. Norris's Introduction (dedicated to Smith), is the long poem 'Kohlrabi,' a philosophically ambitious piece. It is followed by poems of varying seriousness on other vegetables. The problem with some of them is acutely pinpointed in 'Radishes,' another long and occasionally awkward love poem to Jill: 'I have tried to write/ Too many cute poems/ about vegetables.' Yet the whole book finally charms despite its occasional excesses and lapses of taste. Norris has a genuine interest in and love of vegetables, and it shows in his humorous but nevertheless serious homages to them. It's hard to resist a book dedicated finally to the proposition that 'A hot plate of vegetable stew/ Casts off all pretensions,/ Is simply the muck I consume/ That provides continuance for this,/ My most human of lives.'

As I mentioned in reference to the anthology, Claudia Lapp's joyful eroticism impressed me. Certainly that and her fine sense of humour are the most attractive assets of *Honey*.²⁵ Although some of her poems seem to go nowhere, she has a finely tuned rhythmic and kinaesthetic sense which pushes her better poems at you with real energy. I find her poems of desire or genial comedy more engaging than the poems of Romantic imagery like 'the white stallion,' 'Shoes,' 'Hymn' and 'going into the city's centre' seem to me to have an integrity of speech lacking in the other. Their directness is part of their considerable charm. The final poems in *Honey* seem to be more recent and represent an intriguing new direction for Lapp's work. The four 'Mailstrike Poems' employ a longer, looser line, and in them she is able not only to invoke Eastern mythic consciousness but a wide range of literature and incident. They are witty, but also humane, making a fitting end to an enjoyable collection of poems.

*Cleaning the Bones*²⁶ is a sequence of poems in which Joseph McLeod attempts with varying degrees of success to explore the crofter roots of his ancestors in Cape Breton. The poems move from the original immigration from the Isle of Skye to the lives of his own brothers and sisters. It's a good concept, for certainly one of the important things our poets can do for us is try to discover what our personal past in this country means (Gutteridge is trying the same thing). McLeod's use of family photographs adds a touch of visual immediacy to the proceedings. Essentially McLeod is a traditionally minded and technically limited poet. His short line tends to become somewhat monotonous after a while, and many of the early poems, despite the obvious attempt to invoke the psychological violence of the original setting, are too generalized to really engage me. When McLeod comes a little closer to the present and begins offering us verbal portraits of individual uncles, aunts and other forbears, he gets down to concrete particulars and the poems come to life. On the whole, *Cleaning the Bones* is an interesting effort, easy to read and containing a particular vision of the crofter past as it was lived by one specific group of immigrants. If the poems are not especially exciting rhythmically or linguistically, at their best they honestly represent the people McLeod pays homage to in them.

Roland Giguère, one of Quebec's outstanding literary figures, first wrote the prose poems *Mirrors & Letters to an Escapee*²⁷ in the 50s. Now they are made available in one volume in a translation by Sheila Fischman, a welcome event. *Mirror & Letters to an Escapee* is a fascinating book, not least because the surrealistic prose poem is not a form too many English Canadian poets have attempted. It is not easy to discuss these two works, let alone say what they are about. *Mirror* is a character, but he is also a place and an aspect of the creative imagination. As the poem proceeds through its metamorphoses—many of which are strangely comic—the problems of the creative imagination are explored in purely imaginative terms. *Letters to an Escapee* could be written by *Mirror*, for it too argues the dangers of trapping creativity and imagination within walls, whatever those walls may be. Of course, it is implied, escape is always possible. Giguère's imagery, his sense of the marvelous in the normal, his ability to construct a grand pattern of images and metaphors are all noteworthy. Both pieces read easily and offer some delightful trope on every page; they are fascinating examples of the prose poem form.

Calling attention to itself under the headings of 'Cooking/ Photography/ Poetry,' Robert Sward's *Honey Bear on Lasqueti Island, B.C.*²⁸ is certainly hitting all the bases. In fact, this delightful little book has photographs and some lovely drawings and prints by Irina Schestakowich, a few very good-looking recipes (sometimes disguised as poems) plus a series of poems concerning life upon a Float house in the Strait of Georgia. The book is a late blooming flower of the communal utopianism of the 60s but doesn't take that aspect of itself seriously; that is simply context. The poems, disarmingly simple and warmly human in effect, celebrate Sward's enjoyment of life and love with his pregnant 'Honey Bear' as they pass a quiet, gentle summer with friends met during travels on the Float house. *Honey Bear* is a delightful small book of celebration and joy, and as such it can be savoured before turning to another 'major' work.

Christopher Levenson's *Into the Open*²⁹ charts the breakup of a marriage and the first tentative steps of a new, hopeful, love. It concentrates on the shattering effects of the old relationship in poems that alter between the bitterly funny and the truly sad. The title poem finally sounds a note of cautious optimism, however: 'there is no other/ way' it says, 'we must break' from cover, 'the lairs of secrecy, taking/ all that we have and are/ into the open/ night.' Levenson is a poet whose intellect rules his emotions; these poems (in contrast to bill bissett's *Poems for Yoshi*) are carefully crafted, the poet obviously thinking about his pain before attempting to articulate it. There are no simple cries of anguish here. This is not necessarily a bad thing as meditations of real power like 'The Anniversary,' 'Deaf Mute' and 'Homing In' testify. On the other hand, Levenson occasionally sounds a bit too flip as he carefully and 'wittily' turns a poem which obviously comments coolly on the situation which generated it. On the whole, however, *Into the Open* is a collection of poems whose traditional use of image, simile and metaphor serves an overall narrative function well. The story of loss and rebirth of love is one we all know something of; Levenson parses its changes clearly and interestingly in the best of these poems.

I'm not sure if it's because his work has become more complex and mature or because I've grown to comprehend more fully the value of what he does (probably it's both), but I have found John Robert Colombo's recent work both entertaining and imaginatively provocative. His newest book, *Variable Cloudiness*,³⁰ is a collection of found poems, translations and original pieces. If not quite the remarkable whole that last year's *Mostly Monsters* was, *Variable Cloudiness* is nevertheless a witty, enjoyable pot-pourri. In 'On Me,' Colombo says, 'He knows deep down that art and literature, especially his poems, will never explain the mysteries of the universe.' Given this knowledge, he has decided to celebrate those mysteries in all their vast variety, most often as they are manifested to him in the language of daily usage. Colombo is an erudite, classy entertainer and, for the most part, *Variable Cloudiness* is quality entertainment.

*Smoked Glass*³¹ is Alden Nowlan's tenth collection of poetry, and it should almost be enough to recommend it to say that it is vintage Nowlan. Nowlan comprehends everyday human paranoia, he understands moments of quiet desperation or love, he recognizes death's hands in everything, and when he articulates his understanding well his poems speak to everyone. Nowlan is also a storyteller, but his storytelling often mars the rhythmic movement of his poems. In *Smoked Glass* I often found myself enjoying the story but wishing it were written in prose since the line breaks were so obviously awkward. When he sometimes listens to the voices of others, however, which he can do extremely carefully, Nowlan produces magnificent songs of the vernacular. 'Land and Sea' is a perfect lyric example of this, and there are other such jewels scattered throughout *Smoked Glass*. In poems like these, or the striking 'It's Good to Be Here,' Nowlan achieves the power of his best poetry, a power found more often in earlier collections but manifested often enough here to hold your attention.

The problem, as I see it, is that one can no longer review an Irving Layton collection for itself alone; one is, instead, reviewing an institution, an institution moreover which, for better or worse, towers now over the whole Canadian culture scene (what else do articles in *Weekend Magazine* and appearances on *90 Minutes Live* signify?). Layton's latest, *The Covenant*,³² carries on the argument with 2000 years of Christianity-as-anti-life-and-anti-Semitism begun in last year's *For My Brother Jesus*. Though it is a more even collection than the last, *The Covenant* contains no single poem with the power of 'Parc de Montjuich.' As I've said before, Layton's anger against what he now calls 'Xians' is justified, and his bitterly pessimistic vision of humankind is at least as valid as most others. Nevertheless, he continues to publish extremely poor poems along with brilliant ones. The problem with this is that a truly powerful indictment like 'Bacillus Prodigiosus' stands a good chance of getting lost among the mass of unwieldy harangues surrounding it. There are a number of poems on other subjects in *The Covenant*: the usual sexual humour and bravado, some gentle lyrics, of which 'Morning Sounds' shows he can still write fine lyrics when he wants to. A poem like 'Night Thoughts' combines a number of his major themes

to powerful purpose, but his homage to Heinrich Heine is a travesty. I guess I'm saying that *The Covenant* is basic 70s Layton: a few jewels in a lot of trash. If you like Layton, of course, you just might enjoy the *whole* book.

A few years ago, Earle Birney's monumental *Collected Poems* in two volumes handsomely offered those who could afford it a complete collection of Birney to that time. Now, for that larger group interested in a good view but not the whole *werke*, M & S offer us *Ghost in the Wheels, Selected Poems*,³³ complete with a new Preface by Birney and a couple of new love poems. It is one of the best Selected Poems I've seen recently, fully representative of every facet of Birney's 'makings' and managing somehow not to leave out even one poem I would consider necessary to a basic comprehension of his varied craft. *Ghost in the Wheels* will be a must in Canadian Poetry seminars, but what's even more important, it provides a marvelous opportunity for the 'common readers' to acquaint or reacquaint themselves with the lifetime's work of one of our best and most entertaining 'makers' of poems. It's a necessary book; no more need be said.

At first glance, Philippus Aureolus Paracelsus, 1493? - 1541, seems a strange subject for a contemporary poem, but Brian Henderson manages to pull off the feat of engaging this wily alchemist in both his own temporal terms and ours. *Paracelsus A Poem in Forty Parts, with a Prologue*³⁴ is a most intriguing attempt to explore the psychic context of a learned man of an age when signs from above were sought everywhere, in terms of structural semiotics, that modern science of reading those signs of our surround which reveal our takeover of the land on which we live. It's also a self-conscious poem about poetry, an occasional love poem, and a discussion of the putative powers of language. Not all these levels work with equal success, but the whole is an energetic and often engaging work. Henderson has a good sense of language, switching from the learned vocabulary of alchemy, for example, to a taut, imagistic modern speech, handling both with ease. At any rate he does manage effectively to juxtapose certain central events of Paracelsus's life with the central facts of his poet's affair with an unnamed lover. The comments on signification apply to both levels of the poem, and the final poem announcing a successful act of the loving imagination rings true. *Paracelsus* is a complex, witty and engaging book.

Susan Musgrave's new book this year is an enigmatic little sequence in the persona of a woman of a past age. *Becky Swan's Book*³⁵ is a gorgeously produced book, the type Cloister Old English, the stock Kelmscott, but it is much more than that. Becky Swan is a strangely innocent perceiver who hates with great strength. She is savagely, positively negative towards others, gleefully telling us that 'Sometimes their thumbs ought to be/ torn off—witches who do such things as/ killing people and infesting neighbours' and that 'God will suck the bad ones up,/ God snatches the bad ones.' A kind of unholy fear drives Becky Swan as she observes the people of her neighbourhood, her family and her husband. Her vision is powerful, though and it builds naturally to the final terrifying vision of death as a filthy old man you can't escape. Musgrave has caught an authentic power with this small book.

Sono Nis Press almost seemed to disappear for a couple of years there, but it's back in operation, in Victoria now, and has two new books of poetry out. As well, most of its earlier stock is still available, and the press kindly sent me a number of books I had missed during the years of hiatus.

First of the new books is Susan Musgrave's other book this year, *Selected Strawberries and Other Poems*.³⁶ a collection of (often revised) versions of all the poems she wants to keep from her second and third books, now out of print: *Entrance of the Celebrant* and *Grave-Dirt and Selected Strawberries*. It's a collection of considerable heft, and certainly all readers interested in Musgrave will want it. Musgrave has often deliberately attempted to create her poems out of dreams, folklore and myths, but she has only been partially successful. Too many of these poems remain utterly opaque where they only intend to be invitingly gnomic. Musgrave's sense of dark forces of the unconscious is real but often lacks clarity of articulation. When she finds a proper speech, and her best poems are usually persona poems as in 'The Entrance of the Celebrant,' the mythic power of that speech can be stunning, but too many of these poems fall short of that evocative energy. This is not true of the 'Kiskatinaw Songs,' a series of poems given to Musgrave in England while she was reading some historical material on the Queen Charlotte Islands. Here the voices tend to speak clear and true, and the bawdy, the magical, the totemic all find their expression in these songs. The 'Selected Strawberries' sequence is, I suspect, very much a matter of taste. There are some well-conceived parodies here and some genuine poems. Sometimes the whole thing's really rather witty, at other times jejeune. At any rate, *Selected Strawberries and Other Poems* provides a good introduction to the poetry of one of Canada's best-known young poets.

*The Killing Room*³⁷ is Marilyn Bowering's first major collection of poems, though she has published the fine Fiddlehead booklet, *One Who Became Lost*. The poems in *The Killing Room* are often powerful but it is a power of despair, of acceding to death in all its forms without fighting back. 'Death is wide' and 'there were signs/ I was not safe' mark the parameters Bowering's imagination works within here. The cover drawing of a starving girl-child seems only too appropriate, for Bowering's people starve from lack of love and friendship, and they know only that "Morality"/ means us lying dead,/ we'd say.' So the women of 'Married Woman's Complaint' and 'Rose Harbour Whaling Station, 1910' allow the violence their men work upon them, and that is the reason for despair. No doubt Bowering feels that such bitter violent lives are and were lived, but her representation of them is so starkly absolute, so lacking in psychological exploration, that no hope at all remains. Towards the end, there are a few poems which at least begin to work with this deadly material in new, more open ways. The brilliant 'Winter Harbour' is a powerful evocation of frightening yet enticing transcendence through death and is simply the best poem in the book. Marilyn Bowering is a talented writer, but this collection is too bleak for most readers to find enjoyable or even salutary.

Frederick Candelaria is a musician as well as a poet and it shows. What immediately strikes one about the best poems in *Liturgies*³⁸ is their music; his sense of melopeia is strikingly strong. What next strikes one is the wit and intelligence of the poems, their cerebral intensity. Which is not to say Candelaria is unemotional in his poetry, but he does tend to shape his poems rationally even if their subject is passion. *Liturgies* is, on the whole, a rewarding book. I believe that if about one third of its poems, mostly the short 'witty' apostrophes, were removed, it would be a far stronger, more emotionally convincing work, but this could be a matter of taste. Certainly, when particular obsessions—with love as a babel of warring tongues, with the problem of faith in a world so obviously lacking god, with time and the inevitability of death—overtake him, Candelaria produces honest poetry almost naked in its expressiveness. He is learned but wears his scholarship well, and often his knowledge is of road signs or grocery tags. Though it never denies its heritage, his poetry is of the present, and at its best it burns in the imagination of the listener/ reader.

Charles Lillard now teaches poetry, but before he even studied it he worked in the bush of Alaska and B.C. and sometimes on the boats, too, if his poems are any indication. So he is a poet of experience, often of the rugged land itself. In *Drunk on Wood*,³⁹ he announces an 'Ars Poetica': 'To catch what is near—/ the deep clarity/ of a drake's shuffle/ emerging from this blue plate/ of early morning water.' The urge to clear statement of a personal perception of an event *out there* these lines express enters all the best poems. 'Killer Whale' stands out, then, because the understated precision of its description renders the awesome presence of the whale before the wondering sight of the speaker. There are a number of such poems in *Drunk on Wood*, but there are also a number, including the title poem, which strain rhetorically for a sense of transcendence they fail to catch. With his character poems, Lillard has mixed results. Some, like 'A True Wilderness,' capture a person speaking and place him on the page; others fall away into generalities.

On the whole I believe Lillard's more recent *Voice My Shaman*⁴⁰ is better. It avoids most of the faults of the earlier book (although it too often falls into a new one of awkward self-consciousness about being poetry); the diction and tone are sharper, tauter and rhythmically tighter, and the running thread of one particular obsession—a lost love whose memory not only stays but insists on reminding him of his mortality—creates an emotional torque that holds throughout. Of course this remembered love isn't all; these poems emerge from a specific geography—the geography of the northwest coast region—and they often render its presence with clarity and precision. But that geography is a geography in time, and what binds its parts together is the woman and the action of memory responding to her and the places he's known or remembered her. The best of these poems are direct and passionate, and good enough to make one forget the false tone of self-conscious poeticizing which mars some of the others. Charles Lillard has found his voice with *Voice My Shaman*, and it's a voice worth hearing.

The title of Robert Bringhurst's *Bergschrund*⁴¹ announces great heights, great cold, a cutting edge and possible vertigo. As well it should, for these are the poems of a stern, unbending intelligence turning a cold eye on history and humankind. Like the crystal of his 'Poem about Crystal,' his poems teach 'clarity's nature,/ . . . the stricture/ of uncut, utterly/ uncluttered light.' They are hard, demanding, intellectually and emotionally severe, but the best of them (and in this collection that's two-thirds at least, a very good percentage) will fully engage you and offer the rewards that come from strength. The lines quoted above reveal Bringhurst's control of sound. He also commands a surprising control over the language of abstract thought. In the second section of *Bergschrund*, he offers poems on Heracleitos, Parmenides, Empedokles and Pythagoras among others, poems which are not only full of barbed historical wit but which confront their subjects on philosophical home ground. Then, in Part III, he takes on the Old Testament, emerging victorious, especially in the case of 'Deuteronomy,' a brilliant meditative monologue in the persona of Moses. He follows this with a poem sequence exploring a terrifying modern ontology, and concludes with a series of poems on various subjects. The final poem is 'Ararat,' a fitting reminder of the heights Bringhurst inhabits in his poetry. It is not an optimistic poem; it is darkly ambiguous, like the poetic vision which animates the whole book. Bringhurst is good. He is not at all easy; his poems are full of strictures but they are also uncluttered, full of cold but bracing light. *Bergschrund* is a powerful, even passionate, intellectual experience; it's one I recommend.

Everyone from Glenn Gould and Norman McLaren to Marcel Marceau and Phyllis Webb heap their praises onto the covers of Robert Zend's *From Zero to One*.⁴² Happily, the praises are deserved; Zend is an original, exciting, provocative and occasionally frightening writer. Originally from Hungary, Zend wrote most of these poems in Hungarian; he and John Robert Colombo collaborated on the translations, and Colombo is obviously a good choice since he shares a number of Zend's poetic obsessions. The title of Zend's book comes from an essay by Frederic Karinthy titled 'The One and the Nothing.' The last line of the epigraph Zend takes from that essay says, 'the way from Zero to One . . . is about as long as the way from life to death,' and this observation fittingly introduces the poetry to come. Zend is an intellectual given to meditations on that 'way.' It is a way that goes both ways; anyway, any way may be as much directed to life as to death; is it god's way or just humankind's; is there any way out of this trap. Zend's poems situate themselves in the way of such thoughts and questions, and they usually have a clear cutting edge. Zend is often bitter but is equally given to absurdly hopeful dreams. A cynic about so much of life, he can imagine the most beautiful utopias. Many of his poems are fables, little stories with a bite. His wit is marvelous, his range of concept prodigious. A couple of these pieces are dedicated to science fiction writers, and Zend fits easily into their company. Cosmology is as important as psychology to his poems. If he argues death is the end, at least he argues life can be a most fulfilling way of get-

ting there. *From Zero to One* is a delightful, sobering, thoughtful, witty, zany and provocative book. It will keep you awake.

John Marshall's first book, *The West Coast Trail Poems*⁴³, is a series of minimalist 'takes' on the West Coast Trail in B.C. The book is conceived as a sequence, a flowing attempt to render one person's phenomenological sense of taking the trail. Because, for him 'eyes are/ open// throats,' Marshall seeks to swallow his perceptions whole while articulating only a minimal description of what it is he has perceived. When language and landscape mesh perfectly, this results in some powerful gnomic utterances like: 'night, the glacier/ quiet/ mountains/ the background/ stars// a little fire, the circle/ stone// the sky all/ smokehole.' Elsewhere, however, there's a kind of sententiousness in which the idea of the poem romantically overwhelms its other, more interesting concerns. Nevertheless, Marshall reveals an unsettling sense of language in action and an imagistic sensitivity already finely tuned. For the first book of a young writer, *The West Coast Trail Poems* is full of definite promise.

Ken Cather's *Images on Water*⁴⁴ is a stronger debut by another young West Coast writer publishing with Oolichan. It opens with a generous and moving poem to/ about Phyllis Webb, using many of Webb's concepts to establish his own stance as a poet of movement, a poet against stasis. Elsewhere, writing of a photograph of his brother holding a dead bird he has shot, Cather seeks 'to tear this stasis/ of photography, death.' And in the fine sequence, 'West Coast Poems,' he comes to this conclusion: 'I return to the/ highway feel the/ cool of pavement// the whisper of gravel./ underground fossils/ curl to my feet/ (like waves)// become this road./ alive once I feel/ their pull;// the shells through/ which these/ changes flow.' It is as a poet of 'not designed but/ movement the energy/ of sequence,' that Cather is most engaged with language and the space he inhabits. 'West Coast Poems' contains strong images of the coast as a movement to which he must perforce belong. Other poems also capture a feeling of his place that engages one's empathy while a couple of poems on people, especially 'George' and 'E. Lee,' reflect its human mysteries. Some of the more deliberately self-conscious exercises are interesting but lack the emotional integrity of those I've mentioned. The final sequence, about the dreams of a UFO believer, is funny and perhaps signals directions Cather can explore. On the whole I find Cather's taut, short lines suitable to his vision, and his use of spacing good, but his use of commas without spacing is distracting and appears to serve no viable rhetorical purpose. This is but a minor complaint, however, about a fine first collection from a poet whose work I hope to see again.

*The Blue Sky, Poems 1974 - 1977*⁴⁶ is David Donnell's second book of poems, his first in sixteen years. It is a substantial collection with some delightful illustrations by Joe Rosenblatt, and offering us a series of thoughtful meditations on people and states of being. Donnell says at one point that he's not 'a maker of images so much as propositions,' and this fittingly describes the kind of imagination at work in these poems. Quietly thoughtful, this imagination explores ideas as they are lived, by himself or by those he knows. The result is a series of

philosophically tinged poems overlaid by a wistful love of the earth and its creatures. Irony plays across these poems, and a kind of intellectual love of what is observed with such care. Donnell often tells little fables; if his language is plain, sometimes generalized, it serves a vision no less poetic because it seeks to speak of what we all can know. Donnell's style is simple, gentle in its rhythms, containing unexpected flashes of wit just to keep us on our toes. The blue sky of the title poem is an emblem of a space humanity can live within and beneath. Although some of these poems display his reasons for fearing we won't always be able to do so (in a few his too obvious didactic politics get in the poem's way), most of them offer a quiet celebration of human possibility and variety. *The Blue Sky* is not spectacular but has an authority of vision that is finally fully sufficient, and worth waiting sixteen years to see.

David McFadden's *The Poet's Progress*⁴⁶ is an exhilarating trip with one of Canada's joyous cosmologists. Like Michael Ondaatje's spider-poet, McFadden weaves his own tightrope as he walks it, the flow of words only what his open mind provides. In some hands this process could result in uninteresting chaos; in McFadden's hands the process of a mind moving as it will, connections occurring freely, is a delight. 'The poet is a token/ of the world's magic,' he says, and the belief animates his poem. All its strange twists and turns, the weird and oddly juxtaposed thoughts, feelings and memories, the delight in language playing its games, only serve to signal the world's magic through 'the constant arousal' of both the poet's and reader's curiosity and delight. *The Poet's Progress* is an intensely personal poem; or so it appears at first. All the personal aspects keep shifting into the grand impersonal mode of poetry, however, subsumed to the journey of mind the poem maps. It's not the usual *periplum*, but it's a trip worth taking with this lovable and loving guide.

Like Earle Birney in 1976, Al Purdy has given a smaller book than M. & S. usually do to Black Moss Press. *A Handful of Earth*⁴⁷ is a real coup for this small press, for overall it's a better book than Purdy's last one. It contains some revised older poems which Purdy has now decided—on the whole correctly—deserve to be preserved and a number of new poems. One interesting aspect of *A Handful of Earth* is the number of poems on historical subjects reminiscent of poems from *Poems for All the Anettes* and earlier. Of course, since it's Purdy writing them, these poems invoke the change and loss which defeats history even as they celebrate its continuing hold upon us. Death, then, as a force we confront everyday in our thoughts and actions, is also a continual presence in these poems, especially in the triumphant 'Starlings,' a poem I'm glad Purdy rescued from oblivion. Of course, flux, the process of life, is present as well. The new poems include the title poem, an impassioned plea to René Lévesque to preserve whole this space we have finally begun to call home. There's also a long poem, 'In the Forest,' a fantasy sequence which marvelously catches the tone of creeping paranoia taking over a lonely man's fevered mind. A couple of poems set in Purdy's home space and his personal past, and a gently humane mother-daughter confrontation in 24 B.C. Rome are also noteworthy. All in all, *A Handful of Earth* is a collection no fan of Purdy's will want to be without.

Eugene McNamara has long been perfecting his craft, and the best poems in *Screens*⁴⁹ reveal a complex mastery of tone and form. The major focus of this book is the past, the past most of us know only through nostalgia and popular art such as pop music and films. What these poems tell us is that the screens of memory, like the screens of movie theatres, cannot be trusted, not because they lie so blatantly, but because lies and truth are so subtly interwoven there we cannot discover which is which. Of course McNamara is not quite so trapped by the screening process he explores here as his analysis at first suggests. The poems reveal not the truth so much as the difficulties of achieving it. Stars of the silver screen and figures from the past all play roles in his memory, and he sharply highlights both their behaviour and his responses in these tough, taut poems. By using the clichés of popular culture both iconically and ironically—it's in his witty irony that his control of tone is most evident—he manages to produce an elegantly twisted nostalgia, a nostalgia which informs against itself, and this is no mean accomplishment. The best poems in *Screens* are savage and moving glimpses of the human soul in middle-age; they stand with his best work.

Although only two years old and with but twelve books to its credit, Turnstone Press of Winnipeg has attracted a number of well-known writers as well as younger Manitoban poets. One obvious reason for this is the craftsmanship and beauty of their books, qualities abundantly evident in four recent offerings.

Miriam Waddinton's *Mister Never*⁴⁹ is a sequence of poems addressed to the lover ever retreating. Despite a few missteps into sentimentality, especially in parts of 'Fragments of Mister Never in My Dream Telescope,' it's basically a tough, sardonic, yet sensitive look at 'one wise man at the/ fountain of ice wise/ in the single ways/ of love and dry as/ an offstage ghost/ whispering me theatrical/ stars godknowswhat and/ an empty-cloaked Hamlet'. Mister Never is everywhere, yet for the speaker he's never there at all: she places him, often with good comic effect, in London, Paris, Moscow, Ottawa, Toronto and Winnipeg, and also in the landscapes of her dreams. And so she moves to where she can say 'I am/ distanceless/ a prairie/ of far/ snow,' and then conclude with 'Certain Winter Meditations on Mister Never.' Avoiding cleverness for its own sake, *Mister Never* is a witty, occasionally painful book.

Ralph Gustafson's *Soviet Poems*⁵⁰ is his poetic record of a journey to the U.S.S.R. sponsored by the Canadian Department of External Affairs in treaty with the Kremlin in the fall of 1976. Gustafson obviously went there with his eyes wide open, and all his learning and craft in high working order. These eighteen poems, with introductions, reveal once again his personal optimism and faith in the naked human heart. Whether he's looking at Lenin's tomb or the old woman who sweeps Red Square with a twig broom, an ancient cathedral or fabled Samarkand, he responds to the human history and human presence of the places he's visiting. Gustafson has reached the point where he can make poetry out of whatever touches him; the lines flow, the witty, ironic and subtly ambiguous punctuation implies so much more than the words alone say. These are essentially poems of celebration: that the comedy of human life remains a

comedy even there, even though he knows 'The street will always be dirty./ Mankind is imperfect./ Politics and bad manners/ Leave his detritus/ On the perfect peace. We/ Do not understand one another./ The street will have to be swept again.' If he sees 'The Skull Beneath the Skin,' he still notes the healthy blush of the skin. *Soviet Poems* is another clear-eyed look at the changing world by a poet who accepts the changes, of place as of time.

Gustafson, his 'heart tentative' and his mind always alive to the awful ambiguities of living on this planet, reveals his consummate lyricism and his ability to 'now love life, love life' in his larger M. & S. collection, *Corners in the Glass*.⁵¹ Simple this wisdom, but hard won, especially when he forces himself to look beyond the beautiful, present, processes of vegetable and animal life and the seasonal rounds close to home to the great misery humanity's insane wars reveal. If he looks to Viet Nam and elsewhere to have his fears confirmed once more, he always returns to his beloved Eastern Townships, and to the grand patterns of music, myth and the stars, conjuring them to the dance of affirmation which is his mature poetic. He is intellectual, yes; witty and given to epigrams, yes; allusive and difficult at times, yes; but he is also a passionate lover of life, of the world of process he encounters in the best of his poems. 'I am,' he says, 'In a garden on the edge/ Of nowhere, life and death/ In my lap. Of course it's important.' *Corners in the Glass* is a worthy addition to his *oeuvre*.

Pat Friesen's second book, *bluebottle*,⁵² moves back and forth to inhabit the space between his father's death and his daughter's new life, her growing awareness of the world she wholeheartedly enters. Within this psychic landscape, he finds iconic Christs in Spain and Mexico, love and struggle in his own memories, and a world full of both unexpected beauty and horror all about him. Friesen's poems tend to be understated; this works especially well in the poems about his father. Elsewhere, however, they will often seem to stop rather than reach a conclusion. This is not true of the best poems, of course, especially the lovely songs he's found in his daughter's words. These poems reveal a poet who listens carefully to the poetry of children's speech yet places that naive poetry in a much more complex poem of his own to take on resonances it never had alone. There are poems in this book where I wished for stronger rhythms, more vibrant language, but on the whole *bluebottle* is a warm, human collection of poems by a poet who will not remain simply the rural poet his first collection revealed. Friesen is pushing at the boundaries of his own poetic, learning to use others voices and the various cultures of his era to expand the possibilities of his poetry. *bluebottle* is a good book that also promises more to follow.

The poems in Craig Powell's *Rehearsal for Dancers*⁵³ inhabit the same area as do Pat Friesen's, but on other levels they inhabit other spaces as well. He moves not just between the poles of death and birth (or the spirit and the living animal body), but also in the regions where Canada and Australia, the poet's and the doctor's lives, overlap. What is most satisfying about this book is the way so many apparently individual poems slowly gather a gestalt of images and themes

until the whole becomes one long joined song. Powell was obviously impressed by Manitoba's winter when he moved here, with the result that snow and ice emerge as central icons throughout the book. But memories of Australia, other images of art like the Chinese water-carrier, the changing of the seasons, his wife and his children, especially his dead firstborn, others of his family and some of the inmates of the mental hospital where he worked all take their places in the poems. If the music Powell achieves is but the music of the mortal body that will always 'fall slowly dancing,' this is because he knows that like all art, 'all poems tell/ of death without which it would not/ be necessary to speak.' This knowledge, borne 'rejoicing but without hope,' paradoxically sustains his music, whether it be the elegies for loved ones dead, the cool analytical imagistic visions like 'Fingernails,' the psychologically apt explorations of family life or the bawdy comic turns like 'East-North-East' and '1949.' *Rehearsal for Dancers* is a strong, affirmative and entertaining book.

According to one of my dictionaries, 'sounding' is not only measuring the depth of water or diving, but also investigating and, in surgery, the act of probing a bodily cavity. All these meanings apply in various metaphoric depths to E.D. Blodgett's *Sounding*,⁵⁴ a tautly controlled dialogue between a poet and the silent (and long dead) artist, Vincent Van Gogh. In truth only the poet speaks in these poems; the artist's replies are the aphorisms, epigrams and grand statements that are his paintings. *Sounding* is a powerfully evocative if also enigmatic work. At one point the poet suggests Van Gogh's work is a work of gnosis, an articulation in oils of secret spiritual knowledge which the poet also wishes to articulate in these poems. Thus the figure of the sun and the colour yellow assume a prime importance. The poet realizes that Van Gogh, having seen so far and so deeply is inviting him to follow. If the sun is central for its light, the phoenix as reborn bird of the sun also haunts these poems. Van Gogh's death is the less perhaps because he has spoken to humankind through his art. And now the poet, also a figure of the artist, must reply, must *speak to* what Van Gogh's paintings (and the life which brought them to light) say. The result is a poetry of austere passion and passionate austerity. Yet the paradox works, the precise shaping of these poems which speak of and to some of the most nearly chaotic paintings of the Impressionist era grants us a sense of the barely controlled (perhaps barely controllable) desperation of Van Gogh's art that is immensely powerful precisely because it is so strict. (And, of course, Van Gogh's paintings never did fall out of control; they simply pushed the boundaries beyond which control—or vision—might be said to be lost further back.) Blodgett's first book was titled *Take Away the Names*, yet in *Sounding* the act of naming—naming Vincent or the colours he used or the maps he used or the birds and trees and chair he painted—is paradoxically the core of the book's movement. Indeed, it moves to the recognition that everything Van Gogh painted is finally *named* by his name. *Sounding* is not an easy book to read, yet the musical beauty of its lines, the precision of its imagery and the integrity of its commitment to its subject all make it more than worth the many demands it

makes of its readers. It is, among other things, a poetry about painting which nevertheless argues, and proves by its formal content, that poetry and painting are utterly separate. Which is why its passionate austerity nonetheless articulates a true response to the art and the life in which it was shaped.

Finally, two masterful books from Coach House Press, which share a publisher of beautiful books, an aura of great craft and magnificent artfulness and little else.

*Under the Thunder the Flowers Light up the Earth*⁵⁵ is D.G. Jones's first book of poems in ten years and to say it is welcome is to understate the case considerably. Since *Phrases from Orpheus* in 1967, Jones has helped edit *Ellipse*, done translations of Quebec poetry and published the critical study, *Butterfly on Rock*. This latter was a subtle, intriguing, essentially thematic, study which extended Northrop Frye's theories about the literary response to the Canadian landscape to a number of specific works. Yet, although *Butterfly on Rock* pushed at the confines of the Frygian literary mythos, it did not fully challenge it. One of the many exciting things about *Under the Thunder* is the fact that it transcends the Frygian categories; it is a book of a poet 'at home here' in the world which is a garden even if it's also and simultaneously a dangerous wilderness. But it can't be a dangerous wilderness as such if it is simply the place where we live and therefore a garden as much as anything we might think it to be.

The first poem of the book, 'A Garland of Milne,' takes the painter David Milne as an exemplar of the non-Frygian attitude: 'He lived in the bush, the wilderness/ but he made light of it/ He was at home . . . / . . . For him it was a garden.' The poems that follow explore the complexities of such living as the poet perceives them in his own life. Nothing is simple in these poems; they acknowledge and accept all the difficulties of achieving right relationship with the land, often by allusively pairing land and lover in a single poem. The poems argue, then, an erotic love not only for the loved one but for the land itself, where lover and loved one find themselves, and push this argument through a series of delicate and subtly modified images.

Jones has always been a subtle, enigmatic poet, but here his mastery of tone and rhythm are finer than ever. These poems reveal him learning by experience that the perceiver creates the garden or wilderness or, more importantly, the garden wilderness he lives and loves in; their imagery and tone convincingly argue that love through the first three sections of the book. The fourth section then seems brilliantly right in the context of what has preceded it. Titled 'Kate, these flowers . . . (The Lampman Poems),' it is a concentratedly beautiful series of love poems in the persona of Archibald Lampman (an important figure in *Butterfly on Rock*) which completes and complicates the poetic argument of the first three parts. (I should make it clear that Jones has not over-simplified things in this book; if he is no longer terrified of the wilderness his response to it remains, like any other form of love, ambiguous. As he says on the cover, he is interested in exploring the struggle 'between the isolating and disintegrating

elements and the unifying and integrating elements in myself and my world.' One could devote a lifetime or two to making poems of that exploration.) The Lampman Poems are love lyrics of an extraordinary power in which the natural and erotic worlds are fused in a myriad of ways. Perhaps the highest praise I can give them is that they feel as if they are poems Lampman would have written had he the resources—poetic, psychological and geo-erotic—which Jones has in the 1970s in Canada. The final section of the book is a series of poems written in the Caribbean. Here Jones broadens his line and his humour, and a new, somewhat exotic flavour enters. Yet what he learns in that tropical (and therefore most un-Canadian) winter is simply that the whole world is garden, and thus in the final poem he almost mirrors the concepts of the first while suggesting an integration of the opposing images. One important aspect of this book is the fact that it definitely reveals Jones's breakout from the stifling Frygian vision of the Canadian wilderness. There is so much more to it, however, that it will continue to repay the interested reader for years to come. The poems in French or French and English are not political in content so much as by their mere presence. Jones's allusive wit and sometimes corruscating humour are evidenced throughout, as are his eye for detail, his emotional understanding and his supple control of rhythm and tone. *Under the Thunder the Flowers Light up the Earth* is the work of a master craftsman come into the height of his power. It is quite simply a beautiful, complex and moving work, which richly deserves the Governor General's Award it won.

Last but not least we have Roy Kiyooka's *The Fontainebleau Dream Machine, 18 Frames from a Book of Rhetoric*,⁵⁶ a strange and wondrous collection of juxtaposed 'poems' and collages. Kiyooka has long been one of our best, if utterly idiosyncratic artists, and this book is a marvelously quirky missive to us all. I'm not sure if I'll ever be able to 'explain' *The Fontainebleau Dream Machine*, but I do know its effect is greater every time I venture through it. The collages are not simply decorations, they are subtly and wholly intertwined with the words facing them. If the poems are witty and gnomic by themselves (and reveal a punningly wise intelligence and heart behind them), and if the collages are dreamy vehicles of visually sophisticated speculation, together they provoke a special kind of high tension attentiveness. As Kiyooka weaves his shuttles of 'dreams' and 'breath,' of poetry and art, he entertains us by entertaining new universes of possibility. It might be best to think of this sequence of poems and collages as a series of subtly intertwined *koans* provided by the dream machine itself. Though the eighteen frames propose no easily discovered answers they do propose, for the awakened imagination, a sense of immense human possibility. As 'who is really dreaming the dream, everyone, one by one dreamt?' is the final question, so too it's but another beginning. Breath, dreams, the strange balloons which rise and fall carrying our inner lives, these are but a few of the vibrant images *The Fontainebleau Dream Machine* offers us. As you might guess, I love it for its fantastic yet utterly human affirmation of our living—in dream and out. Kiyooka is one of our subtlest, wittiest and most assuredly

ironic artists, and these qualities abound in this book. *The Fontainebleau Dream Machine* is a richly joyous experience, a stunning work from a sly, ecstatic Zen master of the arts.

NOTES

1. David Day and Marilyn Bowering, eds. *Many Voices: An Anthology of Canadian Indian Poetry*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1977. 98 pp. \$4.95.
2. Dorothy Livesay. *Right Hand Left Hand*. Ed. David Arnason. Erin, Ont.: Press Porcepic, 1977. 288 pp. \$15.00/\$6.95.
3. Pier Giorgio Di Cicco. *The Circular Dark*. Ottawa: The Borealis Press, 1977. 65 pp. \$5.00 (?).
4. A.J.M. Smith. *The Classic Shade: Selected Poems*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1978. 96 pp. \$5.95.
5. Lawrence Mathews. *The Sweet Tears of the Judge*. Fredericton: Fiddlehead Books, 1977. 31 pp. \$3.00.
6. Kathleen McCracken. *Reflections*. Fredericton: Fiddlehead Books, 1978. 52 pp. \$4.00.
7. Peter Giesbrecht. *Hungry Leaves*. Fredericton: Fiddlehead Books, 1977. 64 pp. \$4.00.
8. Luella Kerr. *Tenth Muse*. Fredericton: Fiddlehead Books, 1977. 86 pp. \$4.50.
9. Mary Willis. *Under This World's Green Arches*. Fredericton: Fiddlehead Books, 1977. 46 pp. \$3.00.
10. Ted Plantos. *The Light Is On My Shoulder*. Fredericton: Fiddlehead Books, 1977. 36 pp. \$3.00.
11. Jacqueline d'Amboise. *Mother Myths*. Fredericton: Fiddlehead Books, 1978. 100 pp. \$4.50.
12. Roo Borson. *Landfall*. Fredericton: Fiddlehead Books, 1977. 55 pp. \$4.50.
13. Kim Maltman. *The Country of the Mapmakers*. Fredericton: Fiddlehead Books, 1977. 64 pp. \$4.00.
14. George McWhirter. *Twenty-Five*. Fredericton: Fiddlehead Books, 1978. 40 pp. \$3.00.
15. Peter Stevens. *The Bogman Pavese Tactics*. Fredericton: Fiddlehead Books, 1977. 72 pp. \$4.50.
16. Stephen Scriver. *Between the Lines*. Saskatoon: Thistledown Press, 1977. 48 pp. \$8.00/\$3.50.
17. Lorne Daniel. *Towards A New Compass*. Saskatoon: Thistledown Press, 1978. 60 pp. \$9.50/\$4.50.
18. John Tyndall. *Howlcat Fugues*. London: Applegarth Follies, 1976. 84 pp. \$4.95.
19. John B. Lee. *Poems Only a Dog Could Love*. London: Applegarth Follies, 1976. 96 pp. \$3.95.
20. Don Gutteridge. *A True History of Lambton County*. Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1977. 138 pp. \$9.95/\$4.95.
21. Andre Farkis & Ken Norris, eds. *Montréal English Poetry of the Seventies*. Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1977. 150 pp. \$3.95.
22. George Bowering. *The Concrete Island*. Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1977. 64 pp. \$3.00.
23. John McAuley. *Nothing Ever Happens in Pointe-Claire*. Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1977. 60 pp. \$2.50.
24. Ken Norris. *Vegetables*. Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1975/76. np. \$3.50.
25. Claudia Lapp. *Honey*. Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1977. 64 pp. \$3.00.
26. Joseph McLeod. *Cleaning the Bones*. Erin, Ont.: Press Porcepic, 1977. 64 pp. \$4.95.
27. Roland Giguère. *Mirror & Letters to an Escapee*. Trans. Sheila Fischman. Erin, Ont.: Press Porcepic, 1977. 64 pp. \$4.95.
28. Robert Sward. *Honey Bear on Lasqueti Island*. B.C. Victoria: Soft Press, 1978. 46 pp. \$3.50.
29. Christopher Levenson. *Into the Open*. Ottawa: The Golden Dog Press, 1977. 60 pp. \$2.95.
30. John Robert Colombo. *Variable Cloudiness*. Toronto: Hounslow Press, 1977. 80 pp. \$3.95.
31. Alden Nowlan. *Smoked Glass*. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., Ltd., 1977. 71 pp. \$7.95.
32. Irving Layton. *The Covenant*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977. 112 pp. \$4.95.
33. Earle Birney. *Ghost in the Wheels*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977. 160 pp. \$4.95.
34. Brian Henderson. *Paracelus*. Erin, Ont.: The Porcupine's Quill, 1977. np. np.

35. Susan Musgrave. *Becky Swan's Book*. Erin, Ont.: The Porcupine's Quill, 1977. np. np.
36. Susan Musgrave. *Selected Strawberries and Other Poems*. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1977. 164 pp. \$10.00/\$4.95.
37. Marilyn Bowering. *The Killing Room*. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1977. 74 pp. \$8.95/\$4.95.
38. Frederick Candelaria. *Liturgies*. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1975. 101 pp. \$7.95/\$4.95.
39. Charles Lillard. *Drunk on Wood*. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1973. 92 pp. \$7.95.
40. Charles Lillard. *Voice My Shaman*. Sono Nis Press, 1976. 100 pp. \$7.95/\$4.95.
41. Robert Bringhurst. *Bergschrund*. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1975. 103 pp. \$7.95/\$4.95.
42. Robert Zend. *From Zero to One*. Trans. J.R. Colombo and Robert Zend. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1973. 110 pp. \$7.95.
43. John Marshall. *The West Coast Trail Poems*. Lantzville, B.C.: Oolichan Books, 1977. 46 pp. \$7.95/\$4.95.
44. Ken Cather. *Images on Water*. Lantzville, B.C.: Oolichan Books, 1976. 52 pp. \$4.00.
45. David Donnell. *The Blue Sky*. Coatsworth: Black Moss Press, 1977. 77 pp. \$3.95.
46. David McFadden. *The Poet's Progress*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1977. np. \$4.00.
47. Al Purdy. *A Handful of Earth*. Coatsworth: Black Moss Press, 1977. 62 pp. \$3.95.
48. Eugene McNamara. *Screens*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1977. 72 pp. \$4.00.
49. Miriam Waddington. *Mister Never*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1978. 36 pp. \$3.50 (?).
50. Ralph Gustafson. *Soviet Poems*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1978. 48 pp. \$4.00 (?).
51. Ralph Gustafson. *Corners in the Glass*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977. 94 pp. \$4.95.
52. Pat Friesen. *bluebottle*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1978. 72 pp. \$4.50 (?).
53. Craig Powell. *Rehearsal for Dancers*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1978. 64 pp. \$4.50 (?).
54. E.D. Blodgett. *Sounding*. Edmonton: Tree Frog Press, 1977. 60 pp. \$4.95.
55. D.G. Jones. *Under the Thunder the Flowers Light up the Earth*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1977. 112 pp. \$4.50.
56. Roy Kiyooka. *The Fontainebleau Dream Machine*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1977. 66 pp. \$4.00.