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Review Article
Poetry Chronicle IV

The books of poetry keep coming on; despite the rise in paper costs, despite the ways in which inflation should be cutting down the independents the small presses continue to flourish. To which I can only say, "huzzah", for it is the many small presses which keep the new writers coming, which provide a place for new writers to try their wings. Certainly the large publishers aren't going to do it (except, a curious case, one new book from McClelland and Stewart, and it should have been smaller and come from a small press). So a number of the books under review this time come from new little presses. And what I'm going to do is try to review most of the books from a single press together, rather than try to order them from least to best.

To begin, however, I must turn to M & S's big error. It is Catherine Firestone's first book, *Daydream Daughter*,¹ the very title of which suggests pale imitations of pre-Raphaelite excesses, Victorian children's books, soppy Romanticism. Not a good beginning, and I'm afraid Firestone can't overcome it despite a kind of spurious energy of performance throughout.

Most of the poems in Firestone's first book strike me as five-finger exercises; undoubtedly they were of technical value to her, but they have little if anything to say to me. Indeed, her technical facility is to some degree her undoing, for all too often the technical problems she has set herself to solve in a poem are antithetical to whatever mood or emotion she appears to be trying to establish. Most of the 96 pages of this book (surely too many for a first collection) are empty: words and rhythms fail to unite in a meaningful pattern. A few poems — "The Absolute Cube of Sleep", for example — reveal that when she has something to say, Firestone can calm down and write a complete poem (too many of these stop rather than conclude), but on the whole this book is a bad mistake for a major publishing house.

J.A. Wainwright's *The Requiem Journals*² clearly announces its intent in its title. Most of the poems honour the dead: people or past times, the loss of them is the tenor of the words spoken. Spoken, yes, but not in passion: rather these are quiet, sometimes meditative poems, and although understatement and irony can be useful tools in a poet's workshop, their overuse tends to incur an equally quietistic and ironic response. There is nothing wrong with these poems — a few, like "Gravity" and "Poems for the Listeners", are witty and engaging

— but there is nothing here that speaks to me in a voice I cannot deny. Perhaps the poorest poems are those on such famous figures as Pablo Picasso and Janis Joplin; Wainwright gets closer to the bone remembering personal friends. Still, the slightly despondent, slightly witty pose of these poems finally fails to engage me: somehow, nothing's really happening here.

Marilyn Bowering's *One Who Became Lost*³ is a strong second book from this young poet. Not all the poems work, but all make their presence felt. Bowering's poems are intensely emotional, and the dominating emotions are anger/ (hatred) and love. Many of the poems have the violent juxtapositions of mood and movement associated with dreams, and, indeed, the dream is a central concept in this book. The other central concept is myth, as seen in both the poems from Greece and the poems from the Queen Charlotte Islands with their various allusions to Indian mythology. Although I began this collection with a certain small sense of boredom, Bowering slowly brought me further and further under the spell of her often terrifying visions. When rhythm and language unite as they do in the best of these poems, the result is a true testament to the turmoil of the human heart. *One Who Became Lost* represents a big step forward for this young and as yet unheralded poet.

As the title of John Baglow's *Emergency Measures*⁴ implies, Baglow is setting up shop as a politically engaged poet. I must confess, then, that my criticisms of these poems are based on a bias against a poet who would dedicate his book to Pablo Neruda, a bias which insists that Neruda is one of the few successful political poets of our age and a man who doesn't need such a dedication. Indeed, the book calls to my mind Yeats's insistence that out of the quarrels with others we make rhetoric but out of the quarrels with ourselves we make poetry. The political poems in *Emergency Measures* strike me as rhetoric; it's not that I disagree with the poet's politics, for I tend to similar positions; no, it's that political speeches, even witty ones, do not make good poems. Some of the shorter more personal poems interest me as poems in a way the snappy jokes and angry attacks on imperialism fail to do. *Emergency Measures* is not a book I shall return to.

W.D. Valgardson is a well-known short story writer from Manitoba. Now a new little press in Winnipeg, Turnstone Press, has published his first book of poems, *In the Gutting Shed*,⁵ as its first book. It's a fine looking book, replete with fine drawings by Denis Nokony, and it is already in its second printing. Nevertheless, I must say that Valgardson is a better short story writer than poet. Within his powerful and menacing narratives, his descriptions of landscape and details of fishing or other behaviour serve a highly useful contextual function. Too many of these poems are simply physical descriptions, and, while good, they fail to move beyond the descriptive. Only in a series of poems concerning his family, especially his children, does Valgardson begin to engage a human emotional situation with the complexity it demands. The poems of *In the Gutting Shed* are readable but they are not, on the whole, memorable.

Another first book of poems is Pat Friesen's *The Lands I Am*.⁶ A mixed bag as most such collections tend to be, it is beautifully illustrated by Richard Hildebrandt. Friesen is interested in history, personal, political and spiritual. Thus he can invoke grandparents, Dumont and a Christian martyr like Margaret Wilson with almost equal ease. Indeed, aspects of the Margaret Wilson poem, especially the understated imagism, are indicative of his poetry's potential. On the other hand, a love poem to his wife is mawkishly sentimental in its vague abstractions, a fault not found in the series of poems about birth and death sparked by his daughter's birth. *The Lands I Am* will not set the world on fire, but it is a promising first book. If Friesen can concentrate on concretely realized speech and try to rid himself of a tendency to fake a poem out of a slightly unwilling one-liner, as in "Western Show", his next book may be more than just promising.

George Amabile's *Open Country*⁷ is a solid collection of poems emerging from his life in Winnipeg during the past few years. There are a few lapses, but the general quality of these poems is high. Amabile's wit is one of his strong points; that, and the obvious love of and joy in pure language that separates his work from that of Valgardson and Friesen. Amabile's poetic, in the first half of this book, emerges from an almost obsessive attempt to see the landscape in all its (sur) real presence. In such poems as "New Year's Eve" and "Magic Is a Property of Light" this obsession leads to a spoken sense of place that is fully aware and articulate. In the second half of the book, "from First Myth of the Sun", Amabile charts the growth and disintegration of a love affair. This is a tricky proposition in this age of Terry Rowes and Rod McKuens, but he carries it off with only one or two errors of tact and language. Indeed, the raw tenderness of many of these poems is both striking and refreshing, which makes it too bad that the poem titled "Tenderness" falls victim to false jargon. On the whole, however, it is a moving sequence of poems about sexual love, and its conclusion, a mixture of regret, joy and the desire to remember with happiness, is a fitting conclusion to the whole book.

The long title poem of J.B. Thornton McLeod's *La Corriveau & the Blond and Other Poems*⁸ "is a ballad based on a story from the Golden Dog", but it's a very strange ballad. Much imagination has been wasted on the invention of this story, and, in her way, McLeod holds to a ballad stanza. But there are major problems: characters' speeches are as abrupt and choppy as is the narrative description, and the story is not only staccato and chaotic in presentation, but the people fail to come alive as ballad characters. The poem finally fails in its attempt to create a long narrative (modern) ballad out of our semi-fictional past. Many of the shorter poems betray the same faults as "La Corriveau & the Blond." They are so densely packed with images they are finally inchoate. McLeod is at her best when she moves toward understatement, ruthlessly holding her tortured verbal imagination in check. "Moon/ Child", the witty "Rune", "Checkup", and the moving "You Pablo Neruda" represent her poetry at its most controlled, most effective. "You Pablo Neruda" works partly because it is believable human speech; the human voice is present and strong.

The Other Land,⁹ Patricia Renée Ewing's first small collection of poems, is a beautifully produced little book. Ewing is, I suspect, a young poet, for the flaws in her poetry are those I would associate with youth: the assumption of themes too grand for her lyric sensibility, the tendency to present abstract reasons for her already sufficiently concrete images, a lack of rhythmic control upon occasion. Nevertheless, the lyric beauty of individual poems and stanzas, the often startling violence of her imaginings, the almost surreal juxtapositions in such poems as "I dreamed", "A yellow bird clings to my fingertip", and "a medieval tale" argue strongly for her continued growth as a poet. *The Other Land* is an apprentice work; as such, it both presents some strong apprentice poems and suggests that the result of the apprenticeship will be more good poems to come. There is enough beauty and wildness here to satisfy the seeker of new poetic talent that Ewing is such.

The title of Myra McFarlane's *The Fat Executioner*¹⁰ tells it all: this is a journey through paranoia, fraught with murder, war, martyrs to the cause (and there are many causes, all of them bloody with love). McFarlane's world is bleak and dangerous, and the taut, tense toughness of her style suggests the qualities needed to survive in it. Along with the general air of paranoia, there is a sense of technical schizophrenia: McFarlane can't seem to decide whether to join the bill bissett underground or remain an apparently normal member of the establishment. The continual changes from one mode to another are somewhat disturbing, but not nearly so much as the stark vision of interpersonal relationships as intrigue and/ or war which all these poems but perhaps the last one, the witty, sexually playful "Erection", present. *The Fat Executioner* is a slim book; just about the same size as a letter-bomb.

What strikes me first and foremost about the poetry in Marya Fiamengo's *In Praise of Old Women*¹¹ is that the woman is gifted with a massive talent for vituperation. These poems — even the highly praised title poem, supposedly a paean to the glories of growing old and wise — soar and float in the empyrean on the thrust provided by nasty insults. Marya Fiamengo hates, but she hates well, without forgiveness but often with wit. Thus her Serbo-Croatian heritage and the knowledge she has gleaned from trips through Eastern Europe emerge in these poems as hymns of animosity towards those peoples who have attacked the spirit of mankind by trying to destroy or enslave certain kinds of human beings. Though sometimes her justified anger at the despoilers spills over to savage every member of a hated race, and then she seems to be committing those crimes she hates. *In Praise of Old Women* is not a typical Canadian work, then, which is ironic when one considers Fiamengo's pronounced nationalism. All the better, say I, for by writing out of her personal heritage she brings a new and lively perspective to bear within the Canadian mosaic of letters. These poems speak directly from the heart; the best of them speak directly to the heart as well.

Brian Johnson plays the surrealist game in *Marzipan Lies*,¹² the first book from the Porcupine's Quill, Inc. It's a lovely looking book, beautifully illustrated by Colette Malo. The poetry, however, though flashy and occasionally fun, has very little staying power. Johnson uses all the old surrealist tricks all right, the utterly apposite adjectives and adverbs, the totally incongruous juxtapositions, the free flow of the unconscious, plus a lot of easy end-rhymes, but while it's all a pleasant noise, it's nothing more than that. In the final section of the book, he appears to be writing lyrics for far-out pop songs. If the music were really good, then I'd listen to them, but I would probably not pay any attention to the lyrics. That seems to be the problem with this book: a great package, but little inside.

Tim Inkster, who used to run the printshop for Press Porcepic, now has The Porcupine's Quill, Inc. as his own press. He has published *The Crown Prince Waits For a Train*,¹³ and a sprightly looking little volume it is too. Inkster's poems deal with time passing and time past. These poems are quiet, visually evocative, with a dream-like stillness that betrays tension rather than balance. All his people, a tortured priest, Jim Donnelly, a woman all dressed up at the beach, are held coolly at a distance while the ironies implicit in their situations throw shadows and light about them. The tone is carefully flat, perhaps too much so, yet little flashes of wit tend to keep us alert. These are smart, occasionally graceful lyrics.

Short as it is, ch Gervais's *Poems for American Daughters*¹⁴ is too varied. Gervais will play the old machismo game to the hilt and then suddenly turn around with a lovely, quietly intense lyric for his daughter. Although many of these poems are overly macho in their violence, the poems of family love and friendship, such as the deeply felt poem for Earle Birney, have greater emotional integrity. Gervais is a better Romantic lyricist than he is a world-weary cynic; the loving, sensitive lyrics of this collection finally outweigh the slick tough-guy jokes.

Dorothy Farmiloe's *Elk Lake Diary*¹⁵ is a poetic journal of sorts of a year on the land, and it is a nice, gentle, warm, humane little book. Farmiloe has the proper feelings, the right responses, to the nature she finds herself amidst, and it would be a churlish reviewer, indeed, who did not honour her for those feelings and responses. Nevertheless, everything remains a little too languid, somehow vague and shadowy. This is due, first, to the rather lax rhythms of most of these pieces, and second, to the fact that too often the poems haven't been cut close enough to the bone, as is reflected in the overabundance of similes rather than metaphors. Against this, one can place Farmiloe's occasional fine handling of country idiom. *Elk Lake Diary* is a genial little book, nothing more.

William Latta's first book, *Summer's Bright Blood*,¹⁶ is a pleasant, often interesting collection. Pleasant, because Latta, who teaches English at the University of Lethbridge, can think. Unfortunately, I can't say much more in praise of these poems. Latta strikes me as an idea-poet: that is, he gets a good

idea and then gives it shape in verse. Since he generally uses a very loose open form verse, lacking in rhythmic subtlety, I find these more interesting as mini-essays than as linguistic explorations of the perceptual world. Possibly, because he tends to write poems from, rather than towards, ideas, Latta would achieve more within traditional forms; I don't know. I do know that an admittedly unfair comparison of his "Scars" with Michael Ondaatje's "The Time Around Scars" will reveal only the latter as a poem of the kind of power that hauls you hungering back for more.

In his Introduction to Glen Sorestad's *Prairie Pub Poems*,¹⁷ Robert Kroetsch suggests that Sorestad's greatest gift is his ability to listen closely to what is said in the various small town pubs where the oral tradition of the Canadian prairies has been kept alive by the power of beer. It's a good point, and effectively pin-points the source of the pleasure the book offers. Sorestad is not a poet of great power or stylistic subtlety, nor does he appear to want to be. He is a traveller, a man who has entered pubs in small towns all across Saskatchewan and Alberta. There he has watched and listened, with care. And with care he passes on what he has seen and heard. These *Prairie Pub Poems* are as honest as direct and the beer which is their inspiration. Neil Wagner's illustrations fittingly evoke the contexts of the poems — the prairie speaking through its working men as they relax and tell stories.

One thing Artie Gold has going for him, as *Even yr photograph looks afraid of me*¹⁸ shows, is a lot of energy and enthusiasm. Gold is a barbaric yawper but he has a real, if weird, sense of humour and doesn't take himself too seriously. Sex and drugs are the context, the practice of poetry the event within that context. Given his hit-or-miss approach to composition, it's no surprise that there are a lot of misses here. What is surprising are, not just the funky funny ones, but the few really powerful and moving ones, like "The poem I am writing", "Difficult Sonnet" and a few of the short poems which speak directly to another. *Even yr photograph looks afraid of me* is definitely not for every taste, but if you enjoy underground comics you'll love Artie Gold's poems.

Sesame Press is still quite young, but it has shown good editorial acumen from the beginning, as its two most recent books show. *Landing* is Claude Liman's approach and homage to his new country while *The Only Country in the World Called Canada* is Doug Beardsley's home-coming gift, poems on the place he left by a returning wanderer.

Claude Liman sees poetry as a way of entering the place he has decided to call home. *Landing*¹⁹ is a book dedicated to the experience of being landed, an immigrant still, but definitely here. There are weak poems, poems in which the lessons to be drawn from his situation are too obviously drawn. The better poems, however, reveal a sharp wit, a perceptive eye for intricate detail, and a profound sensitivity to family relations, backwards to parents who are fully American and forward to children who have already become Canadian while he's still cautiously thinking about it.

*The Only Country in the World Called Canada*²⁰ called Doug Beardsley back, and the calling has tightened and improved his work. This is Beardsley's second book, and the poems have a clarity and impetus I did not find in his previous volume. The selection of poems oscillates from various perceptions in the poet's continuing present to a number of different 'takes' on historical incidents and incidentals. Personally, I like the historical poems the best, but they must be read in the context of the whole collection, which is sharp-witted, intelligent and perceptive. We shall hear more from Doug Beardsley in the future.

It's not that I'm against Irving Layton's attitudes to Christianity, his statements that Christianity, "the mendacious New Testament", "carefully prepared and seeded the ground on which Europe's gas chambers and crematoria flourished." It saddens me to note, however, that the most passionate and powerful writing on this theme in *For My Brother Jesus*²¹ is to be found in the Foreword. Most of the poems on the subject are slovenly in execution, and that just isn't good enough. For the rest, the book contains a number of poems on long familiar Layton themes, written in Spain, Greece, other parts of Europe and Toronto. There are a few which provide the wit and linguistic play one expects from fine verse, but too many suffer from lack of grace and craftsmanship as much as from sexism or plain folly. Oh, there are a few of these 128 pages which recall the best Layton of old, "The Red Geranium", the first part of "Parque de Montjuich" and some parts of other poems, but, on the whole, I can't recommend this book when so many better ones demand the discriminating reader's attention. And if you really want to read Layton's thoughts on Christianity, try *The Canadian Magazine's* letter columns; he's in fine form there.

*The Catch*²² is a kind of catch-up book for George Bowering; 92 of its 126 pages contain two long sequences originally published in small press editions. In both 'George, Vancouver' and 'Autobiology' (which is marred by some terrible typos), we find a laid-back Bowering, asking us to accept a calm, unhurried exploration of historical, poetic and personal pasts. If their general, and deliberate, lack of excitement is accepted, they prove to be interesting and entertaining pieces. 'It is my body and it rimes, this is the basis for composition and autobiography it is going to be there if you can hold still long enough for it.' The final, newer, section of *The Catch* finds Bowering in a more intensely lyrical mood. "Summer Solstice" is a poem about time and children, while "Desert Elm" looks to the poet's father, connecting the generations on both sides of the poet. They are among Bowering's finer achievements. "Reconsiderations" is a series of re-revisions of earlier Bowering poems, and the 'AW' series is an intense experiment with automatic writing. As a whole, *The Catch* catches one of our wider-ranging poets trying his hand at a number of different poetic modes in a generally entertaining manner.

Al Purdy is back with three books. The first is another selection of "The New Canadian Poets"; and the two noteworthy aspects of *Storm Warning*²³ are a) there are a number of women represented, and b) the overall quality is higher

though perhaps no single writer hits the heights of the best few in *Storm Warning* some five years ago. As before, all the poets are 30 or younger (except for Peter Trower, a very fine poet Purdy sneaks into his Introduction). It's a generally entertaining introduction to thirty-three young voices in Canadian poetry, some of whom we will definitely hear from again. On the basis of their work in *Storm Warning 2*, I want to see more by Rosemary Aubert, Brian Bartlett, Tom Howe, Joan McLeod, Wayne McNeill and Erin Mouré. On the basis of his two chapbooks, I would add Peter Van Toorn to this short list. But the real fun in reading such an anthology is in looking for your own favourite future hopes. Given the range of work and the range of reader response possible, everyone has a chance.

Although finally not as substantial a collection as *Sex and Death* a few years ago, Al Purdy's *Sundance at Dusk*²⁴ gives all Purdy-lovers a reason to be glad. The usual Purdy mixture is here: comedies, tragi-comedies, love stories, tales of epic adventure, laments and homages, sometimes all in a single poem like "Homage to Reeshard". There is a group of love poems, some of which are very fine, others of which fall completely flat. There is the long title poem, which traverses history and myth in a familiar Purdyish manner yet doesn't quite cohere for me as, say, "The Horseman of Agawa" or "Lament for the Dorsets" do. Over the whole enterprise, the shadow of mortality looms darker and larger than ever before, yet Purdy's poetry refuses to shrink, his laughter still heals. The opening poem fittingly introduces the book. "Lament" opens with the line, "They are gone the mighty men", and then moves into the poet's memory of the "record-setters", "the achievers of forty feet at a brass spittoon". It is at once a superbly comic poem and a deeply felt homage to the great men of the past. It is quintessential Purdy.

Finally the New Canadian Library is adding to its list of single author collections. Quite a few years after *The Poems of Earle Birney*, here is *The Poems of Al Purdy*,²⁵ as chosen and introduced by the poet. Of course, since it's a short selected poems, everyone will probably find at least one poem she or he will wish was there. Nevertheless, it's a superb collection, which demonstrates the range of Purdy's work and just how good he is at his best. If you're already a reader of Purdy, then this is the book to give to friends who don't yet know him (send it to someone in the U.S.!); if you haven't yet read Purdy, begin here; you'll not stop here.

Susan Musgrave's fourth book, her first for McClelland & Stewart, is *The Impstone*,²⁶ and it is the best book by a poet new to their house in sometime. Musgrave is a poet given to difficult, gnomic, gnostic speech, but her best poems are emotionally direct and well worth any extra effort they might demand. Some of the best are to be found in this book. *The Impstone* is divided in four. Part One, "Making Blood", is full of myths of discorporation, of separation and loss. Some of these are as clear, as startling, as any she has written. In "Recovery" a variety of voices assert their violent need to fight others: men, the children to come, time itself. The title poem is a finely honed myth of the primal

stone, maker and redeemer, full of beauty and power. "Success Story" further explores loss and negation, the others who murder "magic" as they kill ants (or feelings). "Two Minutes for Hooking", a poem of separation, cuts wittily and painfully in on our feelings. In Part Four, "Archeologists and Grave Robbers", Musgrave's "hungry" spirit explores the Indian past of the Pacific Northwest, seeking new ancestral connections. *The Impstone* is a transitional work for Musgrave, and it has the flaws all such books have. Since she is trying new directions, she doesn't always succeed in realizing the poems' discoveries. What is good is that she is seeking new directions and not locking herself in to a single poetic. As well, there are flashes of a sardonic humour that is both new and welcome. *The Impstone* is not a perfect collection, but it is an entertaining one, with enough first-rate poems to make it definitely worthwhile.

Miriam Waddington's *The Price of Gold*²⁷ is a work of mature precision and craft; there is an earned simplicity to all her poetry now that cannot be faked. *The Price of Gold*, then, is an eminently readable book full of wisdom. At its best, this maturity of outlook and achieved simplicity of craft make for a glowing poetry of great beauty; at its worst, as in the poems of the second section of the book, "Living Canadian", they make for a somewhat forced comedy and a slightly officious didacticism. Waddington is on better ground when she eschews obvious nationalism and explores those two great themes, love and death. As the love is as often for places as people, the poems of the first section, "Rivers", are richly Canadian anyway. It is the final section, "The Cave", however, which truly makes *The Price of Gold* the powerful volume it is. In these poems, the compassionate imagination confronts death head on, through dead lovers, seasons, parents and friends, and finally wins the only human victory possible, the victory of having artfully faced death's implications squarely and articulated a wholly human comprehension. Here Waddington's wisdom and simplicity shine, indeed, like a rare and precious metal.

Intermedia, one of the newer Vancouver presses, is producing a lot of books. One of them, *Pomegranate: A Selected Anthology of Vancouver Poetry*,²⁸ edited by Nellie McClung, is definitely "selected" in so far as it ignores most of the established Vancouver poets, but it has some interesting work by a number of practically unknown ones. Since McClung has allowed only one poem to each of her 36 contributors, it is difficult to get a grasp on any of them. One general impression: by and large, the women (18 of them) show up better than the men. This is a genial and slight anthology, but it's a first introduction to an aspect of the Vancouver poetry scene many people may not know.

Avron Hoffman is something of a late-blooming dadaist, I guess, a writer given over to absurdly parading the absurd aspects of our everyday lives. *Somebody Left the Light on in the Basement*²⁹ offers us "Lunch Hour Pomes", "Risky Monograms", and "Poemes Ordinaires", a selection of prose pieces and verses celebrating the power and unconscious comedy of the cliché. There can be no doubt that Hoffman is clever, and he knows his clichés well. Yet, somehow I am not as amused as I think he intends me to be; much of the

humour seems sophomoric; too often the jokes are over-extended. Hoffman's taste in old daguerreotypes and other forms of illustration is one of the highlights of the book: he has a marvelously developed sense of bad taste. In small doses, this is delightful. In a book of this size, it palls.

Canadian Gothic and other poems,³⁰ the late Stanley Cooperman's final book, is full of implications of despair and death which may not have been intended. The shadows of his death add a depth to this whole collection which might not otherwise have been there. *Canadian Gothic* is Cooperman's strongest and most humane collection. Cooperman was terribly prolific; too much so, I always felt, and this large book contains too many weak, rhetorical and superficial poems. Nevertheless, this transplanted New York Jew was beginning to find his own place in the Canadian west, and the best poems of this book — many of those in the first section, "Canadian Gothic" and the sequence, "Greco's Book" — reflect an affirmation in the midst of despair which must be honoured. I always felt Cooperman had incredible skills which he too often misused, achieving flash and filigree rather than truly felt perceptions of the world as is. *Canadian Gothic* still contains a lot of flash, but the genuinely realized integrity of its best poems is undeniable.

Rikki provides both the poems and the drawings for *Weird Sisters*.³¹ The best poems are most like the drawings: full of magic and mythic ikons, full of sensuality, full of energy and passion. Perhaps about half these poems have that richness; they are spells, castings, and they take us with her "to the place of favorite games". Despite a number of lapses into awkward and obviously didactic phrasing, Rikki can write powerful poems. I find the poems which invoke magic between people and those which explore the pleasure and pain of sexual love her best. Indeed, the whole third section, "From This Feast", is a celebration of love as a form of necessary, exhilarating and necessarily dangerous cannibalism. "Passion is the only queen to hunger for", she says, and the poems intensely insist upon it.

bill bissett's poems are full of magic, too, and in *plutonium missing*³² he carries on as usual, creating chants, attacks on the exploiting classes, strange hieroglyphic drawings and savagely witty jokes. bissett is the last of the true hippies and his magic is the magic of the mystic sixties, carried forward with no loss of essential innocence. *plutonium missing* is a typical bissett grab-bag, a continuing assault on each and every law that would tell us how to live, love or write (bissett's refusal to obey the 'laws' of grammar and spelling is symbolic of his intensely anarchistic lived-beliefs in every sphere). If there is any thematic link in this collection, it is the concept of dream, and many of the most immediately accessible poems explore various aspects of the dream/ reality relation.

bissett's other new book, *an allusyun to macbeth*,³³ comes from another new press, Black Moss. The title poem, indeed the whole book, seems domestic in character, slices of the artist's life in no particular order. There are only three poems in the book (plus a number of fine bissett drawings), and their length seems to tell against their impact. bissett works best in shorter forms, I believe,

even if his collections are often organic wholes. *an allusyun to macbeth* will be interesting only to confirmed bissett fans; *plutonium missing*, with its wider range of moods and materials, provides a good introduction to the man's art.

George Bowering's *Poem and Other Baseballs*³⁴ is a gathering by the poet of all his un and previously collected poems on the subject of baseball, a subject which has long obsessed him. Although many of these poems have appeared in other Bowering collections, they take on a special tone and mood in the context this book provides. Baseball is a great poetic metaphor and a great metaphor for poetry in Bowering's work. In *Poem and Other Baseballs*, Bowering has gathered all his perceptions under the banner of that metaphor into a unified statement, concluding with the still magical "Baseball, a poem in the magic number 9". This is a fine little book.

*The Meal of Magic Cards*³⁵ is the first book of poems by a young writer from the Eastern Townships, Rod Willmot. Willmot has published a book of haiku, and one noticeable aspect of his poetry is the purity of its descriptions. Against this clarity, Willmot's interest in myth and mystery, evidenced in the book's title, often leads him into vague and rhetorical mystification. His best poems reveal both intelligence and a saving sense of humour. The poem-sequence, "Tetragrammaton", a lyrical excursion into sexual love, finally puts the interest in myth to sensual use, incorporating the sense of magic Willmot seeks in certain other poems into a carefully wrought appreciation of two real bodies in loving conjunction. It is the best poem in *The Meal of Magic Cards*, a book not wholly satisfying but with enough sustenance to make it worth a taste.

*Letters*³⁶ would probably not exist if Tim Inkster didn't do the printing for Marty Gervais's Black Moss Press. As Inkster puts it in his Preface, "A letter is also apparently 'one who lets or permits', which definition must surely be reserved for the publisher of this frivolity who has graciously provided me the wherewithal to so amuse myself." Well, *Letters* is an amusement, for all readers who enjoy riddles and beautiful typefaces. Each page of this alphabet contains a series of letters which, when re-arranged, spell the names of various Canadian literary figures with whom Inkster has "been privileged to work either as a poet or a printer." *Letters* is a beautifully designed book, a little concrete poetic *jeu d'esprit*, and if approached in the spirit in which it was made it will entertain and delight.

David Berry's and Peppermint Press's, first book, *Pocket Pool*,³⁷ is a delight in a different way. Berry is a real find, wit, a cross between Chuang Tzu and Buster Keaton, and a writer with a true sense of the power of the word. His poems are mad, joyous games, but they float, they achieve grace as so many poems attempting humour fail to do. Let me put it this way: he not only titles a poem sequence "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Giant Condor", he carries it off, and he had me grinning with him all the way. His point of view is shifty, askew, sharp and entertainingly free of pomposity; the general tone is light, but the insights are real if not of overwhelming profundity. The second half of *Pocket Pool* is a collection of Taoist-like parables: they are engagingly witty and

as full of meaningful non sequiturs as the originals. Berry is especially successful in capturing the tone of Chinese parable, yet his pieces are definitely the product of a post-Borgesian imagination. Top all this off with a series of striking photographs by Rolf Lockwood, and Peppermint Press has a winner the first time out: *Pocket Pool*. by David Berry.

In one of the many poems on Indians who once wandered the land where he was born, Andy Suknaski explores the process of trying to imagine all the "ancestors" who were the "ghosts of my youth". Wood Mountain emerges from *Wood Mountain Poems*³⁸ as a place of immense historical/ imaginative possibilities, one of those places where stories naturally inhere, waiting for the proper storyteller to appear and give them voice. Indians, settlers from all over Europe, a few Chinese: no matter how these various people might have contested with one another above ground, they are now together beneath the earth, part of the mixed heritage Suknaski celebrates in these apparently simple poems. *Wood Mountain Poems* is a celebration of the living past. The breadth and range of materials in this book are huge, yet everything in it is of Wood Mountain, a small place, now dying, in which a young poet could meet and listen to a variety of people most city-dwellers, simply because they "stick to their own kind", never really know. And Suknaski has studied them, has listened to their voices, which he brings to life in these poems. *Wood Mountain Poems* joins that small shelf of books which truly renews us in our own short history here.

In *War & other measures*.³⁹ Gary Geddes continues to work a type of poetry he first explored in *Letter of the Master of Horse* a few years ago, a poetry of passionate monologue. In *War & other measures*. Geddes moves into recent Canadian history, seeking to provide a kind of psychological mosaic of Paul Joseph Chartier, who accidentally blew himself up in the men's washroom of the Canadian House of Commons in 1966. Geddes admits to fabricating the "facts" of Chartier's life, but he insists that the psychology has been revealed over and over again in Canada since 1966. This psychology is unbalanced, out of touch, unable to deal with the political realities of our world. Geddes's Chartier is trained to be an assassin in France during the war, and this experience alienates him from his own body. This original alienation grows and extends into all areas of his existence as he lives in Toronto after the war. Finally he becomes a man possessed by "Voices, voices. // We do what we must, according to / voices that speak through us." This possessed, obsessed man goes to Ottawa to effect a wished-for apocalyptic transformation. His last thought, the final poem, is: "History is being made, / I am the materials." A truly Canadian irony, for Chartier not only fails, he is essentially forgotten (unlike most famous assassins), a mere tragi-comic footnote to recent Canadian history. *War & other measures* is a strong, violent, complex book, full of savage insights; and yet, somehow it finally does not cohere for me. Perhaps that's its final, most devastating point.

Like his first small book, *A Book of Occasional*, Dwight Gardiner's *A Soul Station in Your Ear*⁴⁰ is a serial poem, a poem/ event happening as you turn the pages. It is a light piece, a gently comic rendering of idiomatic responses to the city as surrounding sound, heard mostly on the radio, ever-present. The poems are adorned by a series of superb and superbly appropriate collages by Chuck Miller. Gardiner is a jazz fan, and his rhythms, his lines, are verbal equivalents of good, yet short, improvisations. The "melody" on which he "solos" is itself a collage of concepts: love and jazz, radio communication, music as Eros, etc. *A Soul Station in My Ear* is a loving rendition of a myth of golden sounds in the years just gone by. It is a small delight.

Oberon Press moved past its 100 book mark this year, yet it seems to be getting less rather than more conservative, especially in some of its poetry. Right now, this medium sized press is doing more for poetry in this country than all the "major" presses combined. This is so, despite the poor showing some of the books make.

Don Gutteridge's *Tecumseh*,⁴¹ the final volume of a tetralogy entitled *Dreams and Visions: The Land*, is meant to clarify and bring to a head the interaction between natives and whites throughout *Riel: A Poem for Voices*, *Coppermine: The Quest for North and Borderlands*. *Tecumseh*, the man, knew whites and Indians; *Tecumseh* "tells the story of the Indian's last great confrontation with the whiteman", as the jacket tells us, and it does so without the bathetic errors of tone that marred both *Coppermine & Borderlands*. Gutteridge is trying to do too much in this book: present the white settlers' point of view, the Americans', the Indians', and those of the various authors, notably Richardson and Mair, who have previously attempted *Tecumseh's* story. His use of original documents is good, but their vitality impinges upon his own poems. The best of these represent the white settlers; some of those associated with *Tecumseh* are all right but they too often fail to fully enter the Indian worldview. *Tecumseh* is a worthwhile, readable attempt to comprehend the Indian/ white confrontation in a poetic manner. I believe, however, that, at this point in time, we require longer works to accomplish this, works like Rudy Wiebe's great *The Temptations of Big Bear*; and *Tecumseh*, even the whole tetralogy, comes nowhere near Wiebe's achievement.

George McWhirter's *Queen of the Sea*⁴² is presented as "the story of a ship . . . a new ark, a ship of fools". This is somewhat misleading, for this sequence of poems is more loosely connected than the term "story" implies and concentrates not so much on the finished ship as the shipyards where it was built and the people who work there. There are aspects of this book which remind me of Pratt's ship poems. Like Pratt, McWhirter loves the language of particular technologies, here the technology of shipbuilding. Unlike Pratt, however, McWhirter employs a sly, subtle, quirky wit engaged in the wholly human situation of personal relationships. The best poems in this book, the poems for the poet's father, "In Vacuo", and "Bloodlight for Malachi McNair", have an emo-

tional tension Pratt seldom, if ever, achieved. *Queen of the Sea* is not the kind of book I tend to like, but it is so good of its kind I found it to be a superior entertainment.

Walter Bauer, who immigrated to Canada in 1952, still writes in his native German. Although the poems of *A Different Sun*⁴³ are always full of wisdom, they are not always good poems (at least in these English translations by Henry Beissel). A number of them explore moral problems and emerge not so much as poems as short essays. But there are truly profound poems here which situate the poet in complexity and bring that complexity to life. These include "Interview with an Older Man", where the "older man" dreams of "some young man or woman / Unknown to me, who / Some day may read what I've written / And think: I would've liked to know that man, / Perhaps we would've been friends. / I'm his friend already, and I rely on him." Bauer can rely on such readers, I think, for they will surely understand his poet's anguish as he ransacks his language for something pure in "Words", and as he offers wisdom to the young from his years of growing through this century's great sufferings. *A Different Sun* is a profound, often disturbing, yet always loving book.

In the first poem of *Indian Summer*,⁴⁴ R.G. Everson describes the gooney bird as "a competent serene / unhurried waterfowl", "a poor poet living on garbage . . . / an ignored tenacious / strong swift graceful" being. The phrases could as easily apply to this grand old poet who has never had the popularity he deserves but has nevertheless continued unabated to gaze cleareyed at the world around him and to write of what he sees with grace and an often savagely ironic wit. That wit is on display throughout *Indian Summer*, a collection of recent poems from all over the world. Like Earle Birney, Everson is a grand *travelling* poet. He sees everything and can make the apparently ordinary something extra, dangerous or sweet. Alive to the joys of living, he is also aware of the horrors and terrors the universe so freely dispenses. *Indian Summer* is classical in its unflinching survey of the real, its equanimity before a chaos never fully under control, its recognition that man is the most frightening natural phenomenon of all.

Gwendolyn MacEwan's first book of poems for Oberon, *The Fire Eaters*,⁴⁵ achieves a difficult articulation of ordinary miraculousness. MacEwan is a past master of her art: an alchemist of language and myth, she turns nearly everything into poetic gold. But it isn't the result, it's the process, the metamorphosis always taking place, which engages attention. Some of the best pieces in *The Fire Eaters* deal with the past, with childhood. Tough and accurate, these prose fragments achieve the sensitive balance between innocent perception and mature speculation which most such reminiscences miss. Indeed, speech, the language that will truly articulate one's sense of place in an always shifting universe, is a central concern of these poems, as they move through "Animal Syllables", a series of meditations on art, to the final poems, which recognize that "We all have second-degree burns / And they hurt but the hurt doesn't matter // The living flame of the world is what matters / The fire is

edible, and now". It is Gwendolyn MacEwan's achievement in the best poems of *The Fire Eaters* to make that knowledge singingly alive for us all.

*Beothuk Poems*⁴⁶ is Sid Stephen's first book; it won't be his last. A taut, tight, and strongly understated sequence about the destruction of the Beothuk Indians of Newfoundland, its poems move from perception of the primal place to evocation of the natives' lives before the whiteman came, to precise historical comments on the interaction of the two peoples, to a personal vision of the present holding the past as the poet enters the place and thus enters his own poem (achieving through this precisely the sense of present engagement with past reality that Gutteridge somehow can't quite manage). *Beothuk Poems* is a lament, yes, but it is a tough, uncompromisingly articulate one; the poet refuses to sentimentalize what he has seen and his vision emerges on the printed page cleanly and clearly. One of the best things about *Beothuk Poems* is the consistent natural imagery, imagery which speaks of the life the poems explore yet never betrays itself by being too obviously "poetic". "Boatmaker" is a brilliant example of this imagistic process at its best. Some of the poems focus on Shawnadithit, last of her tribe, who died in captivity. The drawings she made for William Cormack are fittingly dignified illustrations to this powerful, un-pitying lament, this gravestone for a burial ground long lost but not forgotten.

Gail Fox writes tough sharp poems of love and violence and the violence of love, achieving a terrible honesty which will not be denied. In *God's Odd Look*,⁴⁷ her fourth and strongest collection, she explores the wounds and ravages of the heart in the context of a mental hospital. Or perhaps it's just the ordinary world: it's that kind of book. The poems of the first half of *God's Odd Look* seem at first simple and plain. But they are subtle, supple, and like a well-handled whip they teach us about pain. The extreme directness of Fox's speech, a directness she has been working towards throughout her career, is both appalling in its intensity and somehow appealing in its odd flashes of quirky humour. These poems, plus "Dancer", an evocative, elegaic sequence for Nijinski, are the best work Fox has yet done. As well as these shorter poems, however, there is "Conversation with Myself", which takes up close to one-third of the book. It's an extraordinary document, a kind of contemporary "Dialogue of the Self and Soul", and it deserves careful reading; but I'm not sure if it's poetry, despite its undeniable impact. Despite my uneasiness with "Conversation with Myself", I nevertheless feel that the best parts of *God's Odd Look* deserve every reader's attention.

*The White City*⁴⁸ is Tom Marshall's fourth book of poems, the completion of a quartet devoted to the four elements of earth, air, fire and water. It is the air book, the book of the sky, the open space of dreams and visions, the home of the gods. As is proper for a book devoted to such an element, the poems in this book move towards acceptance, and at their best achieve a serenity of tone that is admirable in its precision and generosity. Over the past few years, in both *Magic Water* and *The Earth Book*, Marshall's best work has been in the lyrics, while the longer poems of those books have failed, in one way or another, to

engage the reader's emotions and intelligence throughout. There are some fine lyrics in *The White City*, but the book succeeds on the basis of three long visionary poems which make up the second part, "Out There". In these sequences, "Out There: Objects Disposed, Fragmenting, in Our Own Space", "More Definitions", and "A Message from the Garden of the Gods", Marshall enters the mystic space of Canada as home/land, through Indian myth, Emily Carr, personal travel and a great deal of hard won knowledge. While there are some minor problems with occasional parts of these poems, the total effect is grand. They represent a sustained imaginative trek towards magnificence, and they achieve a visionary sense of being *here* that can only be felt as psychic homecoming. In *The White City*, Marshall has joined those poets who are helping us to feel at home in this country. It's something he can feel proud of.

"I live in the night and write / this down", says Wayne Clifford in the Second Passage of "Passages", the eleven-part poem sequence which makes up the second half of *Glass / Passages*,⁴⁹ a rich, complex, linguistically challenging book. It is really two books in one, both worthwhile. "Glass" is a group of poems exploring a journey the poet once took with his wife and the experience of marriage and having a child. "Blood Suite", the latter of these, is a beautifully modulated celebration of the subtle balances by which we live. Disgusting and pure, rich and sterile, our own lives and deaths confront us in these poems. "I entered the world thru my mother's mysteries, / and living, I court it", says the poet; and it is the *mysteries* of the world, in all their multiplex and awesome glory, these poems seek to engage.

"Passages" is a poem of searching, a poem that could well continue, like Pound's *Cantos*, for the rest of Clifford's life. I note that what is printed here is called "Book I". It is dedicated to the poet's daughter, the generation following, and begins with a beautifully comic and glorious creation myth concerning Coyote and Duck. The eleven passages which follow concern the body in the world. Clifford mixes myth and science, the arcane vocabularies of various disciplines, into the phenomenological mosaic which is the poem occurring. One of his focal interests is perception, and the poetry continually seeks to articulate all five senses' involvement in the lived-world.

Glass / Passages is too complex and exploratory a book to yield up its riches quickly. I believe it will reward the tenacious reader as many simpler, lesser books will not, however, and that in years to come it will slowly emerge as a work of great power.

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1. Catherine Firestone. *Daydream Daughter*. Toronto: McClelland & Steward, 1976. 96 pp. \$4.95.
2. J.A. Wainwright. *The Requiem Journals*. Fredericton: Fiddlehead Books, 1976. 64 pp. \$4.00.
3. Marilyn Bowering. *One Who Became Lost*. Fredericton: Fiddlehead Books, 1976. 72 pp. \$4.00.

4. John Baglow. *Emergency Measures*. Delta, B.C.: The Sono Nis Press, 1976. 75pp. \$5.95(?).
5. W.D. Valgardson. *In the Cutting Shed*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1976. 74 pp. \$3.95.
6. Pat Friesen. *The Lands I Am*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1976. 44 pp. \$2.95.
7. George Amabile. *Open Country*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1976. 36 pp. \$2.95.
8. J.B. Thornton McLeod. *La Corriveau & the Blond and Other Poems*. Ottawa: Valley Editions, 1975. 104 pp. \$4.95/2.95.
9. Patricia Renée Ewing. *The Other Land*. Montréal: Editions Bonsecours Editions, 1974. np. \$2.95.
10. Myra McFarlane. *The Fat Executioner*. Ottawa: Valley Editions, 1974. n.p. \$2.95.
11. Marya Fiamengo. *In Praise of Old Women*. Ottawa: Valley Editions, 1976. 48 pp. \$5.95/2.95.
12. Brian Johnson. *Marzipan Lies*. Erin: The Porcupine's Quill, 1975. 64 pp. \$3.95(?).
13. Tim Inkster. *The Crown Prince Waits for a Train*. Erin: The Porcupine's Quill, 1976. 32 pp. \$2.95.
14. ch Gervais. *Poems for American Daughters*. Erin: The Porcupine's Quill, 1976. 32 pp. \$2.95.
15. Dorothy Farmiloe. *Elk Lake Diary*. Cobalt: Highway Book Shop, 1976. 30 pp. \$2.50.
16. William Latta. *Summer's Bright Blood*. Saskatoon: Thistledown Press, 1976. 40 pp. \$3.00.
17. Glen Sorestad. *Prairie Pub Poems*. Saskatoon: Thistledown Press, 1976. 95 pp. \$10.00/5.00.
18. Artie Gold. *Even yr photograph looks afraid of me*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1976. np. \$3.95.
19. Claude Liman. *Landing*. Windsor: Sesame Press, 1976. 75 pp. \$3.00.
20. Doug Beardsley. *The Only Country in the World Called Canada*. Windsor: Sesame Press, 1976. 36 pp. \$2.50.
21. Irving Layton. *For My Brother Jesus*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976. 128 pp. \$4.95.
22. George Bowering. *The Catch*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976. 126 pp. \$4.95.
23. Al Purdy, ed. *Storm Warning 2*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976. 150 pp. \$4.95.
24. Al Purdy. *Sundance at Dusk*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976. 112 pp. \$4.95.
25. Al Purdy. *The Poems of Al Purdy*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976. 64 pp. \$1.50.
26. Susan Musgrave. *The Impstone*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976. 112 pp. \$3.95.
27. Miriam Waddington. *The Price of Gold*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976. 112 pp. \$3.95.
28. Nellie McClung, ed. *Pomegranate: A Selected Anthology of Vancouver Poetry*. Vancouver: Intermedia Press, 1975. 50 pp. \$3.95.
29. Avron Hoffman. *Somebody Left the Light on in the Basement*. Vancouver: Intermedia Press, 1976. 94 pp. \$11.95/4.95.
30. Stanley Cooperman. *Canadian Gothic and Other Poems*. Vancouver: Intermedia Press, 1976. 130 pp. \$9.95/4.95.
31. Rikki. *Weird Sisters*. Vancouver: Intermedia Press, 1976. 60 pp. \$3.95.
32. bill bissett. *plutonium missing*. Vancouver: Intermedia Press, 1976. 72 pp. \$9.95/4.95.
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34. George Bowering. *Poem and Other Baseballs*. Coatsworth: Black Moss Press, 1976. 48 pp. \$3.75.
35. Rod Willmot. *The Meal of Magic Cards*. Coatsworth: Black Moss Press, 1976. 48 pp. \$3.75.
36. Tim Inkster. *Letters*. Coatsworth: Black Moss Press, 1976. 68 pp. \$6.00/3.75.
37. David Berry. *Pocket Pool*. Toronto: The Peppermint Press, 1975. np. \$5.00.
38. Andy Suknaski. *Wood Mountain Poems*. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1976. 128 pp. \$6.95.
39. Gary Geddes. *War & other measures*. Toronto: House of Anansi, 1976. 78 pp. \$3.50.
40. Dwight Gardiner. *A Soul Station in My Ear*. Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1976. np. \$4.50.
41. Don Gutteridge. *Tecumseh*. Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1976. 120 pp. \$8.95/4.50.
42. George McWhirter. *Queen of the Sea*. Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1976. 96 pp. \$8.95/4.50.
43. Walter Bauer. *A Different Sun*. Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1976. 120 pp. \$8.95.
44. R.G. Everson. *Indian Summer*. Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1976. 96 pp. \$7.95.
45. Gwendolyn MacEwan. *The Fire Eaters*. Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1976. 64 pp. \$7.95/3.50.
46. Sid Stephen. *Beothuk Poems*. Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1976. np. \$7.95/3.50.
47. Gail Fox. *God's Odd Look*. Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1976. 64 pp. \$8.95/4.50.
48. Tom Marshall. *The White City*. Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1976. 96 pp. \$7.95/3.95.
49. Wayne Clifford. *Glass / Passages*. Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1976. 152 pp. \$8.95/4.50.