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Review Article
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It's interesting how we've been told over and over again that somehow in the seventies all the promises of the sixties have been broken. We are asked to believe that the glories of art and religiosity and politics have all faded. Thus the marvelous sense of exploration and opening new doors in poetry must be a thing of the past and whatever is being written today, however well done, cannot possibly match the poetry of the sixties in terms of breaking new ground. But, surely, I reply, the new ground is always there to be broken and art comes from individual artists not decades? At any rate, the spiritual depression many people seem to speak from in the seventies is not mine, and to my eye (even if most of the young writers lack the sense of language a whole generation in the sixties had) some extraordinarily exciting writing is taking place (admittedly, much of it from writers who began in the sixties—my point is that they have not died with the decade). Out of around forty books this time through, about five truly put me off, most are good, if not finally overwhelming, and a few are among the best books I've come across this decade. A search through previous 'chronicles' would reveal at least one, sometimes two or three, super books per year: that's a lot of really good poetry, no matter how you look at it. The world may indeed be falling apart but Canadian poetry is not.

Among other things, Coach House Press should be praised occasionally for its witty approach to the usual problems of publishing. Take *This Is My Best*,¹ for example: subtitled 'Poems Selected by Ninety-One Poets,' it is definitely a different anthology. Like most small presses, Coach House is inundated with unsolicited mss, but its final solution is this book rather than a pure No. All of the ninety-one poets represented here were asked to submit their single best poems and these would be gathered into a Coach House anthology. The result, as might be guessed, is one of great variety—in theme, in craft, in quality. Indeed, there are some terrible poems here; yet, what is finally more interesting, there are a few truly fine poems, and a number of acceptable ones. I would point to Pier Giorgio Diccico, Judith Fitzgerald and Ian Young as poets of real merit. Other readers may choose differently. This is an engagingly iconoclastic, unself-important anthology.

*Portraits*² is Lala Koehn's first book of poetry, the poems selected and edited by Caroline Heath of *Grain* magazine. Obviously both editor and publisher felt this book should be published, but I cannot for the life of me see why. Koehn is still young and, on the evidence of this book, has neither studied modern poetry nor practiced her craft with sufficient self-control and discipline.

There's a prosey looseness and lack of rhythmic tension and control to most of these poems which tend to induce boredom. Ms Koehn uses the ordinary language of daily speech in her poems, but never discovers its mythic core. Though some pieces, like the reminiscent 'Family Portraits,' might, with tightening, work as prose, their language remains flat on the page. Some poems with shorter lines towards the end are better, especially the dream-like 'To My Mother' which is flawed only by its unnecessary one-word line. It's possible that Lala Koehn will someday produce a worthwhile collection of poems, but *Portraits* can only do her harm.

Robin Skelton's *Because of Love*³ presents itself as a poem sequence honouring the Muse in her various earthly avatars, the women 'the poet' has loved. The formality of Skelton's approach to love and to the figure of the Muse is extremely traditional. Within the limitations of that formality, which includes it seems to me a traditionally sexist mode of viewing women if also an awed worship of 'the Goddess,' Skelton does a serviceable if often obvious job. That is to say, too often I found myself thinking more of A.E. Housman than of Robert Graves, who is surely the major twentieth century English poet/priest of the White Goddess.

Skelton uses a number of traditional forms in this book, including, as he informs us in a prefatory note, four Welsh forms. Many of the poems are addressed to individual women, yet somehow everything seems too structured and vague. The schema of the lovers' situation is more important than the individuals who supposedly evoked/provoked these poems. Once, in 'Taste! you said,' the poem breaks beyond the imposed limitations of the book: it absolutely sings in its power of personally felt emotion. Most of the time, however well the machinery works, my sense that it's nothing more than a machine keeps it from moving me.

Fraser Sutherland's third chapbook, *Within the Wound*,⁴ reveals an interesting dichotomy in the poet's work. In a few poems, like 'Marcel' and even 'The Two Hearts of Frida Kahlo,' he writes of particular human subjects and captures with some intensity specific events and emotions. More often, however, he is given to the grandiloquent generalization, and these poems—I suppose you could call them 'philosophical'—simply are not interesting. Admittedly, 'Mothers of Small Children' is almost witty, but a poem like 'Attraction' is appalling in its vicious simplicities (expressed in weak rhyming couplets). He would do well to eschew large generalizations and concentrate his energies where his real talent lies—in personal descriptions.

In his fourth book of poetry, *The Road to Arginos*,⁵ David Solway takes what appears to be a deliberate backward step in time. In the 'Prologue,' addressed

'to certain of my detractors,' Solway argues that in our age 'Metamorphosis works downward / if it works at all' and that therefore he wants 'to improvise a sane / grammar of imagination / devoid of miracle or chance, / for all we want is to make sense.' It's a prologue for formal and traditional stances in the poems to follow. Reason, a philosophical tone, the eighteenth-century note, and an occasionally intriguing irony: these are what *The Road to Arginos* offers, and I'm not sure it's enough.

Many of the poems are set in Greece, so the sense of tradition is often fitting, but too often Solway takes well-worn themes and ideas and fails to invest them with any new or different possibilities. In 'Landscape,' for example, I can anticipate too easily the direction of the poem's imagery, and the result is a kind of ennui. His ironic wit, if that is what it is, often lacks direction. Most of the 'philosophical' poems are pompous, but a number of smaller, less portentous poems give pleasure. 'The Trouble with Angels' is a sly little fantasy; and the attitude of the eighteenth-century philosopher works perfectly in 'Before Captain Cook Landed at Botany Bay' and in 'Alkiviathes.' But although Solway's book is the product of obvious intelligence, he has given up too many of the hard-won lessons of modern poetry without gaining enough in return to capture my interest and delight.

The Pikadilly Press, a new press in London, Ontario, has started a series of small pamphlets called Dimebooks. It's a good idea, something like Delta's Buckbooks of some years ago, and it gives younger, lesser known writers a chance at publication. Three numbers from Dimebooks Volume 2 came to me for review, and they all have something to recommend them.

Hans Jewinski's *The Magician's Cage is Bulletproof*⁶ is, as the title intimates, an attempt to marry Black Mask magazine to transition. The tone is tough and the mood somewhat surreal. This is interesting enough to begin with but soon appears repetitive, especially as the emotions often appear rhetorical. 'For Benjamin' stands out as an understated attempt to come to grips with the meaning of German inheritance in our time.

Ted Plantos doesn't go so much for the surreal as for the harshly real, as if he recognizes that that can be savage and frightening enough. In *Vigil*⁷, he tends toward a pared-down descriptive mode which yet renders his compassion for and involvement in what he sees, as in the title poem about the victim of a car accident. Plantos' turf is the slummy section of downtown Toronto, where the ordinary losers who congregate there are so garish all he must do is *see* them clearly. This he attempts to do, with neither scorn nor romantic admiration. There is a great deal of violence in these poems, a daily, human violence Plantos records with precision.

Michael Largo also describes the ordinary world he knows, but the world he records in *Nails in Soft Wood*⁸ is natural, pastoral, a world far away from downtown streets. These are mostly gentle poems, often washed in the warm tones of reminiscence. Largo has a good feel for the world of animal and vegetable life. He will, I hope, continue to hone his craft, learning how to pare

away the unnecessary fat in his poems, so that the honest sensitivity his poetry already reveals will appear in even greater clarity than now.

Patrick Anderson is still remembered as one of the major Preview poets of Montreal in the forties, but since the early fifties he hasn't been heard from. Now he's back, writing and publishing poetry again. Two collections, *Return to Canada: Selected Poems*⁹ and *A Visiting Distance: Poems New, Revised, and Selected*¹⁰ (a good title for such a wanderer) have appeared in the last year. Both are interesting if only because they reveal how steadily Anderson has pursued his muse over the years.

An interesting pattern of dichotomies is early established in both books: traditional, formal poems which maintain a distance from their subjects and say little to me personally are balanced by looser, more open poems like 'In Macedonia' or 'Stump,' where Anderson's attentiveness to his subject, and to the language needed to articulate it clearly, leads to a much more enjoyable poetry. Anderson tends to use learned imagery, metaphors and allusions, and baroque metaphysical puns. 'Winter in Montreal' is a good example of the careful donnish (and Donne-ish?) wit with which he often decorates his subjects. Indeed, many of the Montreal poems of the 40s reveal a condescension to their subjects I dislike.

The lengthy, famous 'Poem on Canada' is included in *Return to Canada* and it still has power as an outsider's vision of the making of our country. But it's no longer as important as it once was; we have our own versions from within, now. Interestingly enough, two of my favorite poems, 'In Macedonia' and 'A Geography,' are set in Greece. They are apparently simpler than most of the others, as if Greece, with all its history and myth, has enough in its presence to force Anderson to pay attention to that presence as it was and not as it could be made to appear through overt decoration in his verse.

Anderson's work in these two collections shows him to be an early modernist with deep ties to the poetry of the late Romantic period. I was intrigued by a number of poems which reminded me of no one so much as Archibald Lampman. A number of his English poems seem positively Georgian, even the somewhat satiric ones. These are interesting books for the overview they provide of a poet who appeared to have left Canada and poetry behind years ago. But they fail to excite my interest the way either Anne Wilkinson's *Collected Poems* or the best work of younger contemporary poets do.

Eldon Garnet's work is not, for me, among that best; he is, however, certainly attempting something of major proportions in *A Martyrdom of Jean de Brebeuf*,¹¹ a book which he designed and illustrated, and in which he utilizes just about every typeface around to designate his various speakers. These speakers range from Peter, a kind of narrator, through Brebeuf and Brule, various Indians, a Man in the Wall, Jealousy and Exterminas to Mary, the Son and God (who is stuck in a wheelchair).

So what is Garnet trying to accomplish? I must confess that after one reading I am not sure and since the book does not call me back for another reading I'll

likely remain that way. I am sure it's overwhelmingly pretentious, full of bad jokes and puerile theological comedy, and only occasionally exciting *as poetry*. Undoubtedly there are good reasons to attack Christianity for what it wreaked upon native religion and culture. For an atheist, there are good and sufficient reasons for making sarcastic and obscene fun of the whole notion of God and Creation. But then I, as reader, want it to be well done. With real wit, real passion, real poetry.

Garnet presents just about everyone as futile, folly-ridden and sexually repressed (even God). In one or two places, while he suggests a momentary nobility in this or that character, he achieves some powerful effects. Most of the time I find his language unfocussed and his rhythms awkward. Probably my biggest complaint against this book is that Leonard Cohen did it all better, with far greater wit, compassion and compression, as only one part of an extremely complex whole, in *Beautiful Losers*. At any rate, this book doesn't even shock me though it tries hard enough. No, it simply fails to engage my interest, let alone my feelings, although this may not be true for many readers. Certainly it tells me nothing about the Indians that I didn't already know.

*First Scratches No Blood Eye Down*¹² is the first book of a young poet who is still a student at York University and it betrays the youth and studiousness of its author throughout. Fred Gaysek, however, is obviously an interested and interesting student, and his book pretends to be nothing more than an apprentice work, the kind of thing Fred Cogswell of Fiddlehead Books is famous for supporting. As such, it is a book of entertaining promise, for Gaysek emerges as someone who truly enjoys playing in and with language. After a number of obvious apprentice exercises, 'imitations' of older Canadian poets, Gaysek gives us his own poem, 'Suite: Marianne,' which reveals a growing craft and an intensely youthful Romanticism that is just a bit too much. If he can continue to develop the former and eventually transcend the latter, his next book should be something worth seeing.

The latest finely produced book from Four Humours Press in Winnipeg is a first collection by Douglas Smith, *Thaw*.¹³ Smith obviously loves the natural world and he has a sensitive eye for its particularities. His imagery verges on the surreal yet at its best, as in 'Morning at Bird Lake,' it effectively presents with a vital clarity 'the things which are.' In a few poems Smith attempts to comment on the process of poetry; these are not as interesting as the purer responses to the world as he perceives it. His imagination is a richly metaphoric one and his nature is forever in a state of metamorphosis. Suzanne Gauthier's superb woodcuts capture this aspect of the poetry well.

Theresa Kishkan is a young British Columbia poet still a student at the University of Victoria who desires to 'write a truly West-coast poetry.' Her first small collection, *Arranging the Gallery*,¹⁴ reveals that her talent definitely leans towards a precise perception of the West-coast natural environment. For a first collection by such a young poet, *Arranging the Gallery* emerges as a strong and engaging collection. It has its faults of course and certainly Ms Kishkan is still

only a talented apprentice to language, but she has a distinctive feel for her native landscapes and the flora and fauna which inhabit (and inhabit) them.

It is interesting to note that 'A Fury's Song' reveals precisely how important her stated desire to be true to the West Coast is. In its attempts to impose Greek myth on B.C. it fails miserably. Yet in many other poems, especially the ones about fish and the superb taut and tight final poem, 'Etchings,' she is able to *discover* a natural native myth *in* her own environment. If she continues to dwell in and upon that environment her future poetry promises to be truly exciting.

Peter Trower is a logger who has been writing poems for a number of years now. Recently Al Purdy has taken him up as a poet of 'real life.' His latest book, *The Alders and Others*,¹⁵ reveals an old fashioned Romantic both in his response to the natural world and to people (the title 'A Wild Girl to Walk the Weathers With' suggests he's *over* Romantic if anything). As a logger he is interestingly ambivalent about his job, 'our bothersome business,' and the ways logging impinges upon nature, tearing 'up more territory / to the music of money.' This kind of plain statement, coupled with clear descriptions of the woods he needs yet desecrates ('In the green tunnels / there is a universe of reaffirmation / desperation fades'), is what he does best: sounding the Wordsworthian note in B.C.

Trower also writes about people, usually the losers in life, with great compassion for their lives. There's no denying the sincerity of his feelings, but he doesn't always express them clearly. His best poems are stripped bare of ornament so the honesty of his response can show through. Too often, however, his Romanticism leads him to indulge in adjectival overkill and metaphorical rhetoric. Such emotional overstatement defeats itself. When he refuses to indulge himself this way, some good tough poems result.

Glen Sorestad's *Pear Seeds in My Mouth*¹⁶ is a small collection of lyrics of various kinds, humorous, serious, reminiscent, imagistic. Sorestad, the author of *Prairie Pub Poems*, lives in Saskatchewan, which he calls 'this country / of growing myths' in a gentle poem about a badger. In a manner of speaking he's correct and the best poems in this selection realize the truth of the description by honestly depicting people and situations which are part of that growth. His poem on, or for, 115 year old Wazyl Fofonoff is an example of what he does well and is reminiscent of many of Andy Suknaski's poems on similar themes. On the other hand, I find his semi-satirical commentaries on his craft or on such things as Remembrance Day ceremonies in a school simply unengaging. Still, if he is not a true original in any of his poems, Sorestad is a capable perceiver of the place he calls home and of the places he grew up in.

Robert Currie's first collection from a major publisher, *Diving into Fire*,¹⁷ is also a very Prairie book. Because he grew up in Moose Jaw and stayed there, even through floods like the one a few years ago, his poetry emerges from an intimately known place. But it's a place in time, sex and specific ways of viewing the world as well as a place in the spaces of Saskatchewan. *Diving into Fire* is divided into five parts. 'The Way Across' deals with the rites and rituals of

boyhood, that whole thing of testing, especially with the river and the railway bridges. Currie captures it all effortlessly, including the cruelty of the strong kids to the weak and the unconscious cruelty of fathers seeking strength and power in their sons at any price. 'The Divers' is more concerned with water games than trestle games and introduces some elements of aging, of older men's behaviour. In 'Fire' adolescence and young manhood are explored. The first girl friends, first cars are important, but the testing doesn't stop as young men take a ride on real horses still harbouring their dreams of Lash LaRue. It's all a kind of extreme macho scene, the search for a kind of heroic perfection that can only be found momentarily and in the company of other males. 'Flood' is interesting because it represents something recent and an opening up of Currie's concerns. In the best tradition of reportage, Currie captures the various responses of people to the devastation. Finally, in the five poems of 'A Sudden Radiance,' Currie reflects on poetry, his marriage, his friends, and his place, seeming to suggest he's gone beyond the concerns of the early poems. I hope he has, for though he explores these concerns with integrity and a gritty plain style, their lack of irony represents a dead end. I can think of few men who won't be moved, at least to their own memories, when they read *Diving into Fire* (although my memories of Winnipeg, unlike his of Moose Jaw, include girls in the games of personal testing). I wonder how many women will appreciate it, however, except as a terribly clear representation of the kind of male-bonding boyhood they would probably like to change.

In *Blood Uttering*,¹⁸ Cathy Ford speaks most strongly from anger and pain, especially the wounds she has suffered in sexual love. In a staccato stutter she cries her pain on the page, a pain which is almost too difficult to speak. Most of these poems employ short lines, and strange shifts of syntax which don't always work. *Blood Uttering* is divided into three parts, 'Conception,' 'Expression' and 'Illusion,' and to me it gets stronger and somehow clearer as it moves into the third section which deals most specifically with a personal situation, that of an abortion, possibly the 'blood uttering' of the title. At any rate, many of the images of violence and rape in the early parts seem unfocussed and too generalized to be effective. In the last section, however, especially in 'Song Forgotten,' the lengthy 'Riding,' and 'Seeing,' Ford achieves a powerful statement of a woman's predicament. This then makes the following poems of suicidal impulse and the final poems of dreamed escape to the ocean also carry the force of spoken truth. At her best, as in these poems of 'Illusion,' Cathy Ford is a writer of real emotional power.

Rikki's *Knife Notebook*¹⁹ is a journal of a love/hate, a study in psychological and emotional violation, a powerfully paradoxical exploration of relationships not so much tied down to ordinary life as cut off from reality and floating free in open psychic space. The poems and prose events are forcefully realized in a language almost but not quite surreal, and the swiftly changing moods and the playfulness are rendered with stunning clarity.

We play the game of ice and thunder.
 The fire game the sword game.
 The rules are intricate, secret.
 We play blind,

says the poet and shows us how it's done. Her occasional use of French as well as English further argues the double-edged nature of the game. If these poems are 'New spellings for desire,' they are also visions of a 'violent spring' where 'We tame each other. We savage each other.' It is to *Knife Notebook's* credit that it suggests all the paradoxes at once. Rikki's drawings, her iconography of all this loving chaos, round out this powerful little book.

Ken Stange lives in North Bay and his poems starkly inhere in that particular northern wilderness. *Revening Language*,²⁰ the title of his first collection, raises several questions. Is language seeking revenge? Is he seeking revenge on the part of language? Is language simply itself a revenge on life or nature? Poem titles like 'Natural Law,' 'Epistemological Object,' 'Occam's Razor,' 'Determinism,' 'Limits or Credibility' and 'Copernicus in the Bush' all suggest the philosophical nature of the inquiry he engages upon here. Negative statements or groups of epigrams are some of the ways he implies logic's doomed attempts to control raw wilderness.

The book ranges from very poor to very good poems. I find the ones in traditional forms the weakest because I feel an unnatural tension between the enforced statements the form allows and the apparent emotional direction of the poems. As well, a number of the poems appear to be written to make a point. When the poet trusts his perceptions, even of rot and decay, and allows language to engage those perceptions, he achieves a truly powerful evocation of the dangerous and changey world of process which our senses cannot evade in the northern landscapes these poems inhabit.

John Flood, the editor of *Boreal* a tri-lingual journal of the North, makes his first book of poems, *The Land They Occupied*,²¹ an impassioned indictment of the white Canadian government's savage treatment of the Indians during the signing of the treaties, especially Treaty Number Nine, the James Bay Treaty negotiated by Duncan Campbell Scott in 1905 - 6. As his Preface makes absolutely clear, Flood sees Scott—despite his protestations and poems—as a man whose basic allegiance was to the Government and who was, therefore, more than willing to practice 'normal' forms of bureaucratic duplicity upon the Indians under his charge. In Flood's opinion:

Today it is evident that what the Indians were giving away was their birthright as well as their right to live according to the design of their own culture. What they were getting in return in no way compensated them for what they forfeited.

The poems of *The Land They Occupied* emerge, then, from the very real anger Flood, who was born the year Scott died, feels on the Indians' behalf. He begins with a poem about George Gladman of New Brunswick House in 1812 and slowly draws toward Scott's 1905 - 6 expedition, which is the focus of the

book. None of the obvious nor meaningful ironies are left untouched in these poems. Scott's love of civilization and art in Europe and the death of his daughter are juxtaposed to his basic lack of vision when confronted with the very real 'culture' of the people with whom he was treating and the overwhelming fact of death his 'treat-ment' was bringing to them. Yet Flood recognizes Scott's humanity and his occasional attempts to reach the truth of the Indians through his poetry, though he implies that Scott's basic Romanticism had to fail to make true connections. A few harshly realistic poems of present-day Indian suffering puts Scott's work in perspective. Flood's poems are basically unadorned, straightforward statements, but they work together to move a reader to sympathy and agreement. The powerfully evocative old photos from various archives add a poignancy to the whole that cannot be denied.

I'll be honest; when I saw that M. Travis Lane's new book was called *Homecomings: Narrative Poems*,²² I prepared myself for the worst: paltry attempts to do an E.J. Pratt (and I don't much like Pratt). I was wrong, however, for Ms. Lane's 'narratives' are much more complex and subtle as stories than the term normally suggests. In fact, the weakest poem in the book, 'Bushed, a pastoral,' is the one which is most ordinarily a narrative poem.

No, what Ms. Lane appears to be really interested in is not a simple tale but rather the complex web of character, and in the two really interesting sequences of her book, the title poem and 'The Letter,' she explores character through persona poems of some power. 'The Letter' is made up of the meditations of an old widower who retires to California where he 'builds' a baroque garden, yet is finally called back to the Emily Carr darkneses of B.C.. 'Homecomings' is Penelope's version if Penelope somehow lived in an Ithaca that was also New Brunswick. Its 59 sections swerve through the seasons, the changes of purpose and possibility and the subtly altering moods of its speaker with verve and vision. It is the best thing in the book and the real reason for reading it.

Norman Levine wrote the eleven poems of *I Walk by the Harbour*²³ in 1949 and 1959 at St. Ives, Cornwall. As he says in a prefatory note, 'Looking back to those times, and to the verse, it is apparent that it was a reaction to the physical presence of this particular place (the harbour, the moors, going out fishing) which produced most of the poems.' The poems themselves reveal the craftsmanship and descriptive detail which mark Levine's prose. Precision of language, clarity of perception, rather than rhythm or rime, are what hold a reader's interest. Certainly any long-time reader of Levine's prose will want this book. Others will discover in it the views of a sensitive and well-travelled mind.

The Poems of Irving Layton,²⁴ as Selected and Introduced by Eli Mandel, is a worthy addition to New Canadian Library's small group of introductory collections of Canadian poetry. Certainly it will prove useful where it's aimed, the classroom, but it is also a worthwhile purchase for anyone who has not yet read this energetic and flamboyant poet at length. In his idiosyncratic way, Mandel has served the poet well. Not all of Layton's best poems are here (though the poem I still tend to consider his single most complete utterance, 'A Tall Man

Executes a Jig,' is), but a representative sampling of just about every kind of poetic game Layton has played is placed before us. Mandel has deliberately chosen verses which critics and scholars have lambasted because they represent a side of Layton's poetic personality we cannot finally ignore. Certainly *The Poems of Irving Layton* proposes clearly and articulately the irrepressible range of Layton's endeavours as a writer. It is the product of a poet we may often get angry with but whom we finally must acknowledge. Eli Mandel's brief Introduction is witty, intelligent and useful. *The Poems of Irving Layton* is a valuable introduction to a major poet.

In *The Singletree*,²⁵ Leona Gom leaves home for good; she looks at her roots on a Northern Alberta farm once more, mourns the passing of her father, remembers the harsh beauties and even harsher cruelties of that place and recognizes the need to escape. Restrictive and spiritually narrow as that background is, however, it is the basis of the strongest poetry in *The Singletree*, all of which occurs in the first section, 'Origins.' Gom's persona throws off her restrictive background and hits the road in 'Moving,' hitching across Europe and America, finding and losing lovers, discovering possibilities, but though the familiar story is told in an animated fashion it isn't really made new. Nor are the vagaries of settling down and teaching, which form the core of 'Here.'

Gom has a good sense of humour and she uses it in her poems. As yet, however, she hasn't found a way to get beyond the superficially ironic comedy of sly commentary, as when she realizes she's failing the Women's Liberation Movement in 'Abdication.' Her later poems lack the passionate intensity, even if it's only an intensity of negation, which the poems of her 'Origins' have. Gom's sense of irony, her witty imagery and intelligent metaphors all suggest she will continue to write and will come again to write poems of real emotional power, but in *The Singletree*, for all it's an entertaining book, that power is only found in the poems of painful personal memory.

*Sparks*²⁶ is Michael Harris's second book of poems, coming six years after his first, and it is both less obviously experimental than *Text for Nausikaa* and more controlled. It is, in fact, a fine collection by a poet of real talent. Harris has a well-developed sense of rhythm and fully understands the power of repetition and offbeat rime, and his dry but often sparkling wit is present throughout. As well he knows how to break lines for the best effect, giving many of his statements a double-edged quality that keeps us on our toes. Oppositions, sudden shifts of mood and tone, of concept, and a sardonic but never cruel awareness of the human condition surface continually in these poems. What Harris achieves in his best poems is a very personal, original and captivating *tone of voice*; we hear not so much a 'poem' made as a voice speaking, and its speeches hold our attention, as all good poems should. There are enough such poems in *Sparks* to make it a worthwhile addition to your poetry shelf.

Tom Wayman is a likeable poet, one of the few genuinely humorous poets we have, possessed of a richly comic vision of humanity and yet a writer with a real moral/political vision to purvey. *Free Time*²⁷ is his fourth book in five years and

so perhaps my feeling that, despite my enjoyment, many of these poems seem repetitive is due to the fact that Wayman has just been writing too much too quickly.

Wayman concludes *Free Time* with a series of interview poems in which he spells out his position as a writer. 'It is the detail of things, the intricate/interlocking activity here that excites me,' he says, admitting later that there is also 'the house of dreams/about which I have written so little.' Wayman does love the intricacy of the real world, no doubt about it, and he feels for the people with whom he has worked in truck factories, but in *Free Time* his political position begins to affect the poetry. I don't necessarily disagree with his leftist politics, but I find many of the poems in this volume too obviously didactic and too much like essays rather than poems. They are interesting, but more as personal journalism than as poetry.

Opposed to such essays there are the many fine travel poems and the powerfully moving poem based on an interview with Neruda's widow, 'The Death of Pablo Neruda.' In this poem Wayman wisely lets the details speak for themselves; they do, and their speech is political in the finest, most dangerous sense. Finally, there is the delightful, warmly romantic suite of love poems, 'Sugar on the Rim.'

I don't disagree with Wayman's lessons, but I begin to feel I've heard them too often before. Perhaps he needs to turn to 'the house of dreams' for a while to discover more in the language than the simple speech he has tended to use for his didactically humanistic tales of the working life. *Free Time* is an entertaining book by an author whose heart is in the right place. It's just my feeling that he's taking it easy, doing the same old thing, that makes me complain a bit about it.

Brian Brett is a young B.C. poet who appears to have spent a lot of time working and living in the bush. *Fossil Ground at Phantom Creek*²⁸ is his first collection of poems, with woodcuts and drawings by Leonard Brett. Despite various flaws of inexperience the book promises much more from Brett in the future. His epigraphs come from Kenneth Rexroth, Tu Fu, Earle Birney, Milton Acorn and Patrick Lane; they not only indicate where his interests lie but declare an allegiance to a particular tradition of poetry.

Brett is obsessed with metaphor and too often I find he overloads his poems with too much metaphoric baggage. The plainer description and single extended metaphor of 'Sleeping the Alpine Meadow' are what make it one of the most accomplished poems in the book. As he learns to control his metaphors Brett will, I think, come to create more poems as tight and taut as this one. One aspect of his obsession is a powerful linkage system throughout the book: the cosmic ecology of his macro/micro vision of galaxy and animal body. The repetition of a variety of images reinforcing this metaphysical connection is one of the most interesting aspects of this novice but often powerful collection. Moreover, in the final two longer poems, the title poem and even more 'Crayfish Moon,' Brett seems to achieve the kind of unity of image, metaphor and didactic thought he has been striving for throughout.

In *the martyrology Book IV* bp Nichol says, 'the japanese saw poetry as everyman's/like thot or breathing' and it is this concept of poetry that Alan Sofirik has captured in his delightful small book entitled *Selected Translations from the Text of Okira*.²⁹ As the biographical note on Okira is deliberately vague and ambiguous, we are left to surmise just how artful a work this book is; but whether the 'translations' are real or fictional the resulting poems have the quality of fine homespun. They speak in ordinary human discourse of the things on earth we know. These are poems of everyday existence yet they are not ordinary because the language bespeaks a perceptive eye always looking at everything it encounters in the journey of life. These are small but intensely real poems. Jean Wong's illustrations are fittingly beautiful additions to the text. Next let's hope we'll see what Safirik can do with his own Canadian northwest pacific landscape.

Harry Howith has organized *Multiple Choices: New and Selected Poems, 1961-1976*³⁰ to orchestrate his various moods and modes in verse. It begins with a found poem summarizing Democritus's philosophy that 'in nature/there is nothing but atoms/and void space': a fitting starting point for poems which continually hold up our own emptiness to us.

Howith is a poet of the intellect in most of these poems and he essays a hard-edged satire, often in a mode inherited from the early Eliot. At their best these poems are sharply etched aphorisms which draw blood even as they draw laughter. The best of them achieve an angry, taut intensity—such small perfect poems as 'If the World Were My Poem, I'd Revise It' or the much anthologized 'Priorities.' There are also a number of interesting meditations on art, morality and life. These seldom achieve a passionate intensity but rather move in a stately philosophical manner to their closures (they do succeed as David Solway's similar efforts do not).

It is in the third section of *Multiple Choices*, in poems mostly early but with a few very recent additions, that Howith reaches for real passion. 'The Seasons of Miss Nicky,' still his most heartfelt articulation of love and loss, remains one of my favorites. The other poems on this theme are also fine, most especially the poignantly cutting 'Sequel to "The Seasons of Miss Nicky",' which definitely brings the story to a close. Harry Howith tends to maintain distances in his poems, to deal with his subjects coldly and analytically, but when he steps closer, as he does in the love poems, he achieves an emotional power unusual in a poet of his temperament. *Multiple Choices* is a fine introduction to this too-little-known poet.

Alphabeings & Other Seasyours,³¹ as the title in its smile-provoking way should imply, is a joyous book of visual marvels from Canada's grand old wizard of poetry by any other name. It is a gathering of Earle Birney's visual poem/puns, the various experiments which Birney has carried out in the area of concrete poetry over the years. The major point to be made about this book is how much fun it is. It is delight-full. Yet Birney is not simply playing silly games. Rather, his play with letters, words and visualizations is a way of reveal-

ing to us once again how much more there is *in* language than we usually realize. *Alphabeings & Other Seasyours* is more than good fun, it is a liberating experience and one I heartily recommend to all.

Raymond Souster presents us with a Spring collection of new poems in *Extra Innings*,³² a huge book crammed with all the kinds of verse Souster has claimed for his own. By now, when a new Souster collection comes along we know we can trust him. In *Extra Innings* all the usual Souster concerns are present: the compassionate and guilty awareness of the poor and aging, the joy in jazz, those sharp, satisfying images, little colloquies with a nature that is always alive, reminiscences of good times past, especially baseball, sardonic laughter at the expected hypocrisy of politicians. Indeed, to travel through these pages is to listen to the late night talk of an old and trusted friend.

There is something new in this collection, however, and it has to do with a fascination with the past which Souster has never articulated so completely before. In a series of poems under the general title of 'Pictures from a Long Lost World' Souster stretches out his line to engage historical moments of significance from earlier in the century and all over the globe. These poems are a fascinating departure for this poet of Toronto and a welcome in their historical savvy. A few similar poems concern dead poets Souster knew, the best of them being 'The Ford Hotel, Coming Down,' which brilliantly captures the presence of that giant of a man and poet Charles Olson. *Extra Innings* is pure, high-octane Souster.

In her first book, '*A Choice of Dreams*,' Joy Kogawa explored her two heritages in tiny vignettes which quietly and assuredly captured moments of intense personal insight or feeling. *Jericho Road*³³ marks a departure from the tightly controlled but essentially straightforward verse of her first book. Many of these poems appear to lack specific roots in personal experiences; they are intriguing explorations of poetic possibilities as much as they are attempts to capture aspects of contemporary life. As many fail as succeed, I feel, but the successes make Kogawa's effort to explore new modes of poetic discourse worthwhile. When the poems fail to hold together, it often seems to be because the language has led her to maintain too great a distance from her subject. But in poems like 'Bast, the Cat Goddess' or 'As Those Who Are Too Old' the involved tone of the poem marks its success.

Thus in many of the poems in the section 'The Wedlocked' the personal quality of the struggle being explored allows for an emotional intensity too often missing from the more objective reports of the first section of the book. The longer work 'Poem for Wednesday' assumes the technical gains of the earlier poems into a complex narrative of love and loss. It is a strong climax to this book of varied successes and failures but always interesting experiments.

I don't think it would be going too far to say that *Sometimes I Think of Moving*,³⁴ Elizabeth Brewster's first book of poetry in three years, is her strongest collection yet. For one thing, despite the blurb's basically true claim that 'her style is plain-spoken, her vision unclouded,' there is a wider range of formal

play with language and style here than formerly, with occasionally very complex speech, as in 'Man and Moon.' Most important, however, is the clarity of vision: Brewster carefully exhumes the very nub of remembered experience in the best of these poems. If her language is plain (and it's only so in a relative fashion) that is because she is concerned to see her subjects clearly and to say, with as much clarity as possible, what she sees. There is a lot of emotion in this book because all the emotions she invokes are *there*.

She is also much more self-consciously present in many of these poems *as the poet writing before our eyes* and letting us know how fluid and dangerously, exhilaratingly, changey the process of the universe is:

What looks solid and frozen—
ice, rocks, bodies—
really burns or flows.
Each melts into all.

She also shows us how she, as writer, can direct that flow within the poem. In the fine poem sequence 'Scenes from an Abandoned Novel' she continually asserts her prerogative not to tell all, to leave the writing as ambiguous as life.

Brewster has divided her book into five sections. 'The Silent Scream' contains poems of memory and poems for the dead in which she argues for living, if possible. 'Where I Come From' is about the various physical foci of her past life. 'Map of the City' celebrates Saskatoon, where the poet now lives. 'The Dancers' is a series of elegies, mostly, where once again Brewster celebrates life. Sentimentality that is lacking in the rest of the book tends to creep in here. 'Renewal' contains love poems and poems of self-renewal. Brewster's wit, often ignored by reviewers, is present throughout. All in all, *Sometimes I Think of Moving* is a warmly entertaining, devastatingly honest collection of poems.

John Robert Colombo's new collection of 'found poems,' *Mostly Monsters*,³⁵ is the most utterly entertaining work he has given us in a long time. I chortled and chuckled my way through its pages with great delight. Yet funny and entertaining as these artfully arranged quotations from 'classics' of horror and superheroism in various media are, they are something more as well. Columbo manages to have his ironic cake and eat it too in *Mostly Monsters*, for his juxtaposition of horrible and beneficial monstrosities on the page as, willy-nilly, they are jumbled together in our media-dominated imaginations produces what can only be called a philosophical *frisson*: the fear he has us laughing at is still real at some level of subconscious feeling and belief.

Columbo has everyone here, from the Saint and Buffalo Bill to The Werewolf of Paris and a Zombi. Horror movies, radio serials, 'sci-fi' films, comics and all the 'Romantic' novels which first introduced so many of these 'monsters from the Id' to the public—Columbo has ransacked them all for his so precisely 'right' renditions of his creatures 'at their moments of epiphany' (as the jacket puts it; and how wonderfully apt an use of Joyce's term, in the context of the book as a whole). As Robert Fulford notes in *Saturday Night*, 'Leafing through

it is like touring, with an amiable and concerned guide, the subterranean passages of the modern imagination.' The point is well taken if we remember that 'the modern imagination' is both sophisticated and given to a variety of nameless fears for which most of Colombo's carefully chosen monsters provide a metaphoric handle. So many of the descriptive or hortatory passages Colombo turns into 'poetry' are overwrought melodrama—which his presentation ironically highlights—and yet, beneath the obvious comedy of the presentation, the terror (however clichéd its expression) which we felt as children is still there. In its complex rendering of the emotional juxtaposition of these apparently opposed feelings *Mostly Monsters* triumphs as an act of the imagination.

Gerry Gilbert comments, in an interview called 'Outerview' in his latest book *Grounds*³⁶ that 'a lot of my work isn't on pages, that's the last place the poem happens.' An important comment, for Gilbert has long been a kind of guerrilla-poet leader on the West Coast, an artist a lot of other artists have looked to for nourishment, guidance and good vibes. As he says elsewhere in the book, Vancouver is the 'city I've been a fluid instance in for most of my time.' As an instance, taking a stance *in* a particular way of living his art, a fluid way, he has continually become a centre of activity, most recently as editor/publisher of *B.C. Monthly*.

Yet many of his books fail to ignite interest outside his circle of friends; which is OK, the same applies to many writers today. Yet *Grounds* is, to me, the book which should introduce him to a wider audience. The word games, the playful sense of reality as a flux to swim in, the essentially joyous celebration of the 'non-essential' essence of being, all these and more emerge more clearly and with greater verve than before in these pieces. 'Poetry,' says Gilbert, 'is an evolving language, constantly giving each language back to the place—like the group or tribe or class of people—it came from. I test language.' And he tests it mostly in the place and for the 'tribe' he knows best, in Vancouver and environs.

Grounds is a mixture of poems, prose pieces and pictures. It all holds together, is surely grounded in the poet's life, and succeeds as his last book *Skies* did not. Parts are weak, but the overall impression *Grounds* leaves is a friendly one. Rimes and puns, genuine enjoyment of the language as that which and by which we *speak* to each other, these elements are the grounds upon which Gerry Gilbert writes, and I think he's right to do so.

After a book of troubled visions of life in South America, *Unborn Things*, Patrick Lane has returned to his home province of British Columbia and his life as a worker and writer there. His new book, *Albino Pheasants*,³⁷ is, I think, the beginning of a new, more open and more openly compassionate, poetry for Lane. Poems of work, both in the present and the personal past, poems of love and poems of an intensely observed natural life share these pages. On the whole the language is sharply evocative and shaped into finely crafted lyrics.

Thus he writes with warmth and understanding of the complex problems of the Sikhs who did the worst jobs at the mills and faced in their alien tongue the racist hatred of the other workers. Or speaks with love of the old master

carpenter under whom he trained. He tells about the anger and frustration that jobs in the mills or on the street gangs inflict upon him. He speaks of love and loss, of the danger he has felt in love—"Women, like wounds, are what you must survive"—yet goes beyond this apparent dead end to celebrate the love and lover which give him a son. Finally he seeks and finds a kind of peace on his own small plot of land; especially in the title with the 'albino birds, pale sisters, succubi.'

There are no easy affirmations in Lane's poetry: everything worthwhile is difficult and dangerous, but he sees and pursues such promises anyway, and from that pursuit come these poems. *Albino Pheasants* is another strong book from an impressively tough and compassionate poet.

Some of the most exciting and inventive poetry being written today emerges from the poets' recognition that 'the language / is not spoken, / it speaks.' One poet who feels this is George Bowering, from whose most recent book, *Allophanes*,³⁸ that quotation is taken. *Allophanes* is a witty and complex serial poem which began when Bowering heard Jack Spicer's voice in his head saying, 'The snowball appears in Hell / every morning at seven.' Bowering decided to 'listen' as carefully as he could to whatever voices spoke to him and to write everything he could down. As he says later: 'If you speak in tongues this trip, companion, / may I listen in ears?' In point of fact, Bowering's 'ears' are extremely sensitive and what he has given us in *Allophanes* is a linguistically rich, allusively and punningly effective exploration of the further reaches of the title's meaning: all appearances or, as the cover blurb suggests, 'those things which are other than what they at first appear to be, all taken together.' The many references to alchemy further suggest the poem's awareness of metamorphosis as the process of vital interaction—with language, with people, with life. *Allophanes* is then a quest through other voices for a new start, and 'where else may we find our beginnings / but in the language?' Bowering's genuine trust in 'the language' makes this arcane poem a remarkable achievement.

Robert Kroetsch, though best known as a novelist, is another poet who believes in the power of language, even if he feels, Westerner that he is, that the language must be 'de-created' before it can create our Canadian prairie-scapes truthfully. He seeks to explore 'the dream of origins' out of which his poetry has grown. His most recent collection is *Seed Catalogue*,³⁹ a beautifully made book from Winnipeg's new Turnstone Press. The title poem is illustrated with reproductions from MacKenzie's Seeds 1916 and 1922 catalogues, and throughout it's obvious the book has been lovingly designed and made.

'Seed Catalogue' and 'How I Joined the Seal Herd' are two sections of a long continuing poem called *Field Notes*, of which *The Ledger* was the first section. 'Seed Catalogue' is a personal dream of memory which asks three questions: How do you grow a gardener, a lover and/or a poet (though of course they're all the same question, really)? If it can't fully answer them, it at least provides a number of cogent insights into the problems of belonging to place which they propose. Facts, documents, stories, reminiscences, all combine to form part of

the poet's dream. Kroetsch, as Prairie poet, is interested especially in the stories Prairie people tell. His poem is often more like a tall tale than a lyric but for him bullshitting *is* the way to get at the poetic truth he seeks. So if 'Adam and Eve got drowned' Pinch-Me (because I'm dreaming?) escapes to dream again of oceans, of becoming a seal's lover perhaps, in that richest of all seas, the mind. In these two large poems, as well as the best of the shorter ones, Kroetsch's richly ribald humour, his sense of the legendary in what people past and present do, his awareness of the erotic and mythic in our lives and his deep devotion to speech shine through. *Seed Catalogue* is entertaining and provocative, and then some.

*Top Soil*⁴⁰ won the 1976 Governor General's Award for Joe Rosenblatt and I don't think too many will complain about that. It's a big book, containing poems and drawings from the now out-of-print collections *Bumblebee Dithyramb*, *Blind Photographers* and *Dream Craters*, as well as selections from Rosenblatt's earliest books and some new work. I've praised some of these books before in this column so all I can say is how happy I am to see them available once again.

Rosenblatt is an original. He's a Nature-loving poet, but how many of those write surreal praises of everything from bumblebees and moths to bats and mandrillos. Rosenblatt's 'GREEN LADY, THE FIRST LADY OF THE UNIVERSE' is not only sexy, she is always engaged in sex (mostly with bumblebees, according to Rosenblatt). As he says, he likes to watch: 'THE ANIMALS HAVE GIVEN ME INNUMERABLE EYE ORGASMS.' When he recovers from them he writes poems, to pass the pleasure on.

Since I've spoken before of the marvelous intricacy of his imagery in his more or less straightforward lyrics, I am going to call attention here to the many chants, poems meant to be read (shouted, sung) aloud. Basically I just want to tell you how much fun these are. Try 'Animal Rhythm' or 'Extraterrestrial Bumblebee' on your friends at a party sometime. Oh, they are a joyful noise! Rosenblatt's wicked little drawings, many of which decorate this marvelous collection, deal with the same material as his poems. They're funny, sometimes devilishly satirical and always side with the animals. *Top Soil*, if you haven't yet made the acquaintance of Joe Rosenblatt's art, is a definite must for your poetry collection.

Eli Mandel's most recent book of poems arrived just as I was finishing this article. A late summer addition, it immediately takes its place near the top of my list of books for the year. *Out of Place*⁴¹ is one of the best attempts yet to locate in space, time and language the poet's place of rooted beginnings. Of the three epigraphs (two are quotations concerning the area of Saskatchewan where Mandel grew up), 'the nature of fiction / supposes our presence' best indicates the nature of the poetic journey to follow. Ann Mandel has contributed a brilliant science fictional Preface which suggests the Ourobouros-like nature of the quest as well as the highly evocative photographs which grace the poems throughout.

But the poems are what count and they count for much in this 'attempt to give some form to experiences ranging from a return to the country of the poem to memories and rumours about the past.' The poetic journeys the poems record are 'fiction not fact' as Mandel admits yet they so clearly register 'our presence' as to give the facts a place they previously lacked in our imaginations. Mandel's combination of documents, extracts from other books and a wide range of poems emerging from his own real and imaginative experiences explores 'the endless treachery / that is remembering' in a complex manner that continually turns in upon itself, drawing us in to the plot of memory with him. Thus the poems intellectually and emotionally alter our perceptions of both past and present in the place Mandel comes from, and to.

Part I of this ambiguously named book is called 'The Return' and records Mandel's various responses to the place, the gods of place and the 'remains of speech' which yet speak to him, and through him to us. Part II, 'The Double,' contains a series of poems on the figure of 'the doppelganger' as myth and psychic reality. These two sections take up most of the book and take us through a series of incredibly heady changes and speculations. Part III is a short suite of love poems for Ann, a sharply etched and utterly open acceptance of a chancey world with her in it. Part IV 'The Epilogue' looks back ironically, philosophically and finally, in the well-known 'Pictures from an Institution,' passionately on all that has gone before.

The poems in *Out of Place* can stand alone but together they form a gestalt of great power. Mandel has taken great chances in these poems but the result is worth it for he has truly heard the ghosts, the petroglyphs, the gods of that place and of our lives and allowed them to speak to us through these poems. At this point I can only register my delight in and gratitude for this book for I haven't the time nor yet the familiarity with it to discuss it as it deserves. All that needs to be said now is that *Out of Place* is a major work by one of our most important and provocative writers.

Richard Sommer is another poet who believes in listening, carefully, to what language says through him. His two new books, *Milarepa*⁴² and *left hand mind*,⁴³ share this concern plus a philosophical outlook which owes much to the Tao and to Tibetan Buddhism. Though different from each other and from the general run of contemporary poetry, they are entertaining and intellectually and emotionally stimulating.

Milarepa is a series of poems to and about a Tibetan monk who lived from 1052 to 1135. The poems, given to Sommer as he read about Milarepa, present stories of the monk's apprenticeship to the sage Marpa, of his various deeds, of his death and of his influence on his own disciples. The 'lineage' in which Milarepa sought 'the teachings' is similar to Zen Buddhism and enlightenment comes in jokes and riddles, often when least expected. Milarepa pays in pain for his enlightenment but he gains much, eventually.

Milarepa not only provides an authentic sense of the kind of discipline these monks practiced but, through its paradoxes and arcane comic energy, it offers a

literary experience of that discipline and the thought behind it. Sommer moves easily into the voices of all his characters; his use of vernacular is precise, witty and effective. If he says 'the thing most of all that has drawn me to Milarepa is the hand cupped to his ear. He listens,' then part of my praise for him in both these books is that he listens, too.

In *left hand mind* Sommer listens to the right hemisphere of the brain. The left hemisphere's orientation is to the logical and visual while the right hemisphere is acoustic and simultaneous. This means that the poems 'of' that hemisphere should be much more oral/aural and co-temporal than most ordinary writing and this is precisely the case. The poems in *left hand mind* are reproduced in Sommer's awkward but clear left hand script; writing with his left hand forced him to listen to the right side of his brain.

The results of this experiment, recorded during a lengthy Autumn, are fascinating. The right hemisphere's sense of acoustic simultaneity short circuits ordinary syntax and the result is that intensely felt physical perceptions and dream perspectives as well as powerful emotional connections enter the poems oracularly, in swooping lines of rimes, repetitions and strongly incantatory phrases. This is a musical book: we 'share with music: voices through us who we are.' Indeed, the question of 'who we are' is basic to these poems for by listening so carefully to the hemisphere which has tended to be silenced since the rise of Greek philosophy, Sommer senses the multitudes he contains (and perhaps hears the gods once more). Again and again he quests through incantation for some apprehension of the multitudinous person he is.

The rich syntax-disrupting, truly subterranean linguistic structures of these poems may seem odd at first but if you sound them you soon find they have their own dream-like logic and they truly sing. They are meant to be heard and not read silently on the page. Upon occasion a single phrase will become a mantra-like focus for a poem, whether an elegy for a suicidal friend where 'nothing' becomes something mysterious and profound, or simply attempt to speak the problems of self. The penultimate poem of the book, coming after so much impersonal/personal speech, is a pure vision but one spoken in the mode the left hand mind has mastered during the previous months. It is a joyous expression of that mastery as well as an affirmation of such visions.

I read the whole book through aloud twice and I loved it. Love, sex, pain and the suffering of non-communication, the ecstasy of union with the loved one and with the always seasonally shifting physical world, all spoken here as a kind of chant, almost a prayer sometimes, forcefully articulate *left hand mind's* unique perception of the world, both inner and outer. This is simply a beautiful, loving book.

As is the final book under review, and I had better declare my bias from the beginning: I believe Frank Davey is correct when he says in *From There to Here* that 'bp Nichol's writing is the most courageous body of work in Canadian literature today.' Davey wrote this when only the first two books of Nichol's ongoing, possibly lifelong, poem, *the martyrology*, were available. Now we have

*the martyrology, Books III and IV*⁴⁴ (plus a reprint of *Books I & II*) and they serve only to confirm Davey's statement. *the martyrology* is an incredibly courageous work of art, on whatever level you might wish to approach it. It is also a work so multiplex and exploratory in nature that several readings will just begin to make its wonders apparent to you.

I loved *the martyrology, Books I & II* but *Books III & IV* surpass them even as they build on the absolutely necessary stories, myths and legends the first two books contain. The early books provide most of the information about the 'saints,' those figures of Nichol's personal potential. And Nichol is a true acolyte who will follow his saints wherever they may lead him.

Indeed. Though the saints appeared to die at the end of *Book II*, putting everything in jeopardy, a postscript proved that language cannot die and suggested that 'a future music moves now to be written.' To simplify mercilessly: that 'future music' is sought throughout *Book III* and finally discovered in the 'Coda: Mid-Initial Sequence' which follows. *Book IV*, which Nichol clearly says is the beginning of a new large part of the ongoing poem, is that 'future music' and oh does it ever sing! Nichol follows language into its own depths, exploring extravagantly and joyfully the life of letters (in every possible sense of that phrase). It could be said he is playing games with words here, silly puns and palindromes, and that nothing serious comes of it. I expect many conservative readers will say just that. I am sorry for such readers for they will not only miss the delight as well as the profundity of the journey Nichol invites us to all participate in but they will miss the opportunity to expand their consciousness of the possibilities of language to which *the martyrology* testifies.

And yet this poetry is not simply word-play; *the martyrology* abounds in powerful examinations of the concepts by which we live. Nichol explores the problems of family in a century of diaspora; he examines new concepts of community, of family; he worries about how to live well in our time and how to live in this place, Canada; he considers the concept of the city throughout history from Dilmun (the first) to possible future ones; he considers linguistics. Yet all these themes, concepts and arguments emerge naturally from his attempt to follow language's own organic laws. Nichol's life is the focus of the poem but his life is dedicated to language and it is language which leads him on—to speak and so to love.

the martyrology, Books III & IV is full of love: for his 'discovered family,' his friends and his readers—who by the act of reading him are able to become his friends. It is a book extravagant in its largesse for those who will open themselves to it, a poem so rich in rhythmic vitality, deep rime and sheer extravagant beauty I claim it as one of the most brilliant pieces of writing it has been my good fortune and pleasure to read in a very long time.

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