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Review Article

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I have to admit it's not getting any easier to carry out this assignment. The books keep pouring out; I keep reading them, slowly gathering my responses till I have enough for the next six-month installment. But obvious problems of ordering arise. I can't read them in any particular order and I can't *really* list them in order of preference because there are so many which are just about equal in value in my opinion. Oh well. I'm going to begin with the one anthology I have on hand, then move slowly forward from the least interesting to what I consider the best. Just remember that in the large middle section the books are all more or less even.

*New West Coast*¹ is a massive anthology of over 250 poems by 72 contemporary British Columbia poets. There easily could have been a century of them but, as editor Fred Candelaria points out, 'several poets . . . were away or their mail was lost or delayed, and others did not have anything on hand at the moment to offer for publication.' Still, if the collection is incomplete it is representative, and that is what matters.

Seventy-two poets is a lot: the range is immense—from Birney, Livesay and Woodcock, through Bowering, Marlatt, Musgrave and Wah, to Bett, Hubert and Zonailo (all of whose names could be replaced by others equally familiar or unfamiliar. Known or unknown, innovative or traditional, Romantically or Classically inclined poets jostle for a chance to claim our attention. If there are a fair number of poems I don't care for at all, the general level of competence is high; I believe most readers will discover more to enjoy than dislike here.

It's impossible to start mentioning the poems I enjoy; there are just too many of them. Certainly it's exciting to find good work by people I've never before encountered. Each selection includes a biographical sketch and a statement on poetics. On the whole I'm not sure that's a good thing: too many poets get self-indulgent when granted space to wax theoretical. The best statements are short and pithy (Earle Birney's 'i try to put all the requisite commentary in the poem when i don't succeed there is always a critic to supply it' being one of the wittiest); the worst are far too lengthy and 'sincere.' Still, many poets—among whom George Bowering, Daphne Marlatt, Fred Wah, Brian Fawcett and Stan Persky stand out—make general statements of real value. *New West Coast* is too big and various to submit to quick definition in a short review. Simply, it is a

book to have around, to dip into at random, to live with for a while. As an introduction to the B.C. poetry scene of the 70s, it's invaluable, giving you a glimpse of writers whose work you will want to explore further in their own books.

One of Gordon Gilhooly's poems in *Not Having Constructed My Ark*² is called 'damn the clichés, full speed ahead,' which could lead to a light ironic exploration of banal speech. Alas, irony is not one of Gilhooly's accomplishments, but cliché is. I cannot doubt the sincerity of feeling behind at least some of these poems—especially the ones on the deaths of his father and friends—but there is no parallel sincerity of form. Gilhooly may mention Purdy and even Shakespeare but his writing is more akin to Rod McKuen's. One or two of the pieces show a modicum of wit, but on the whole banal language and rhythmically vapid lines offer an interested reader of contemporary poetry nothing to engage the sensibilities.

Jim Brown helped found Talonbooks in the 60s, published a number of interesting and promising collections with them. Throughout the 70s, he's been silent, but now he has started Blue Mountain Books, whose first publication is his *Northern Light*,³ a collection of poems from 1973 to 1976, illustrated by Julie Zangmo Cowan.

Most of these poems are 'head' poems, spaced-out and full of KRSNA-feeling. Most of them also strike me as rhythmically weak and full of vague, clichéd diction. 'eye dont build poems like eye/used to. . . ./these words are more related/to the flight of random/birds/in a swarm or like bees/do they find their way to/the petals of your heart?' he asks, I have to answer, well no. Even the line breaks seem functionless.

There are a few short imagist-like poems, a couple of poems from Mexico which reveal careful observation, a couple of prose pieces like 'Atlas,' and the occasional line or two where the conversational tone of a genuine laid-back voice breaks through, which attract one's attention, it's true, but on the whole the promise of the early books has not been kept.

I would like to like Murray Weisgarber's *Spiral Waves Whirling Motions*,⁴ a collection of uppercase poems inspired by the conception and birth of his son and revealing, the dustjacket says, a 'special blend of prairie mysticism.' Alas. The illustrations, once again by Julie Zangmo Cowan, are OK; the 'poems' are uppercase cosmic fluff, the floating abstractions acid highs are made of, it appears. In the final verse, Weisgarber points out (or confesses?) that 'IDEALIZED ABSTRACTION IS STILL PREDOMINANT;' to which I can only agree. Oh, all the proper references to Eastern religion, the Tarot, UFOs, Isis, DNA and LSD, Chakra, the Wheel of God are there, but so what. The 'poems' are limp and rhythmically vacuous. Of course I'm probably just missing the whole point, but this book leaves me cold.

*Children On the Edge of Space*⁵, Mick Burrs' second book, contains poems written in B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan over the past 10 years, and it's not nearly as bad as the other two Blue Mountain books. Occasionally flashing a

glimpse of comedy, sometimes offering neat imagist phrases, Burrs tends to write message poems. His didacticism, though often marshalled in a good cause, tends to prevent his poems from truly singing. There are too many poems in which the figure of the understanding but misunderstood poet hogs the stage. Burrs is more engaging when he looks around and then tells us, clearly and concisely, what he sees, as in the sharply imaged 'Northern Woods.' For me, the book is overbalanced in the other direction, and weakened thereby.

Christopher Heide's first small pamphlet, *Poems of a Very Simple Man*,⁶ is most interesting when most simple. Some of the nature-image poems, a few ordinary memories, the title poem: these, despite local awkwardnesses of phrasing or rhythm, reveal a potential for creative understatement I rather like. Heide, however, tends too often to give in to the temptation to make Romantic Gestures; the result is usually clichéd and bathetic. This is an occasionally enjoyable small collection; let's hope that in it Heide has gotten the urge to tell us the truths about love, etc., out of his system.

In the final poem of *Names of Thunder*,⁷ Scott Lawrence tries to pull a fast one on his potential critics, appearing to apologise for but really proudly claiming 'many voices.' I think the problem is not so much that he uses many different voices but that he speaks too many of them awkwardly. The person behind these poems emerges as an OK guy, if occasionally preachy and pretentious in his somewhat facile use of Eastern religious jargon, but I finished the book feeling a genuine dissatisfaction, feeling that it was all somehow too bland even though many of the poems seek to shock. At any rate, Lawrence's 'songs', his rhyming poems, are weak; we have had far too many parodies of the Lord's Prayer to have to put up with another silly version; mention of the bodhisattva does not a profound poem make. M & S have harmed another young poet by failing to edit his work properly; Lawrence could have given us quite a nice book about a third the size of this one. Certain of his imagistic lyrics and some of the poems about real people have a genuine presence, and there are some good lines elsewhere, but on the whole the poems simply don't hold my interest. Lawrence may have potential, but this collection fails to reveal it except in fits and starts.

I always hate to see people handicapping themselves, but that's what Mary Humphrey Baldrige has done by titling her new collection *the loneliness of the poet/housewife*.⁸ I mean, it reeks of all the wrong pretensions. In the event, Baldrige gives in to pretentiousness upon occasion but not nearly as often as the title might lead one to believe. The poems that tend to work here are those without an obvious point, poems like 'The Solitary Tree' or 'The Children,' where close observation uninterrupted by obvious moralizing secures a specific perception for her readers. A number of too obviously didactic poems are deadwood in this collection, but when Baldrige trusts her perceptions and her simple speech the results can be moving.

Peggy Dragisic's first small pamphlet, *From the Medley*,⁹ is a sometimes interesting but very uneven work. The 'medley' is her life as wife and mother,

and these loosely connected fragments are her attempts to articulate, give shape to, the changes each day with 'one husband two kids' brings. At the end she admits the writing is 'MY need not ours' and says she has 'been working to/arrange/shadow shapes of our days,/never really calculating/for a cure—' but too often the lines never rise above the 'need' to assume a shape representing something valid for the disinterested reader. Although some of her repetitions do move toward poetic intensity, too much of this small pamphlet remains stuck in the diurnal rounds it tries to record.

In his essay, 'An ABC of Contemporary Reading' (*Precisely: One*, 32), Richard Kostelanetz suggests that often 'new contents are better handled with older forms, precisely because unfamiliar experiences are more easily understood and communicated in familiar formats.' I think this formulation applies to Gwen Hauser's *The Ordinary Invisible Woman*,¹⁰ a collection of poems and diatribes from a radical feminist and socialist perspective. Hauser's book is essentially political and didactic, presenting a case that is still thought by many to be dangerously radical. Her attitude seems to be: all right, THEY think I'm a weirdo, so I'll be a weirdo but boy am I going to tell them a thing or two. And she has much to tell. Since I'm a man, my criticisms are *ipso facto* suspect, but I find some of the work, love and dream poems far more *politically* successful than the purely political diatribes. Perhaps that's because they seem to emerge from a felt and lived reality, not from a tract-consciousness. Moreover, they tend to reveal a greater concern for language and form than the didactic rants, which too often use older forms without rejuvenating them. Hauser loves puns; sometimes they're witty, sometimes they're silly and obvious. On the whole this book fails to engage my aesthetic interest, but probably it doesn't even wish to do so. Its appeal to women, especially those in the movement, may be great (I am sorry to have to add that it turns out to be one of the worst proof-read Fiddlehead books in recent memory; that does interfere with one's reading).

In *Girl of the Golden West*,¹¹ Beth Jankola records the dreams and acts of a young woman who wanted to live with the men in the Zane Grey books but had the misfortune to be born in contemporary Canada. As another writer recently put it with so much fictional verve, *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*. Though it's undoubtedly unfair to Jankola, I can't help comparing her little book to that big one, and hers doesn't do so well in comparison. On its own, however, this series of prose/poems is entertaining and even occasionally poignant (also occasionally bothersome, when her control of idiom slips). The cowgirl dreams, she gets to a ranch and observes the cowhands and she eventually get to ride 'The Stallion.' Of such stuff are dreams and slight entertainments made. Jankola's little book is fun; and it carries a sting, albeit a small one.

Pier Giorgio di Cicco deserves credit for attempting a wide range of poetic forms and subjects in his first major collection, *the Tough Romance*,¹² but I must admit I have great difficulty liking most of the poems here. There are a number of problems with Di Cicco's work, and many of them are due to his very

real talents. For example, he tends to toss out metaphors almost too easily; they are rich, they are various, but they often get in the way because in their self-conscious brilliance, or plain wrongheadedness ('tulips mouthing the white/clouds'), they call attention to themselves and away from the poem as a whole. The many versions of the wind which appear throughout are good examples of this fault. Joe Rosenblatt is quoted as being moved by 'a melancholia so pained that I am gripped beyond words.' Well: to me the 'melancholia' which animates so many of these poems seems adopted, a Romantic property but not really, integrally, *there*. As well, since so many of the poems seem rhythmically awkward, more broken prose than poetry (I am aware of a number of prose poems near the end, but in them the stanza breaks seem arbitrary), they fail to capture my kinetic imagination. I am aware that I just may not like the kind of poetry Di Cicco writes (though when he seems to copy Lee or Cohen, as he oftentimes appears to do, he fails to live up to the originals, which I do like), and that others may find his work very fine indeed. I feel he is working in modes which no longer offer enough to either poet or reader, unless handled and renewed by a true master. Still, I cannot ignore his successes, especially in the poems on his Italian heritage and family history, like the fine 'Grandfather,' a poem whose quiet simplicity of language and short rhythmic lines speak with far more power than does the often overblown rhetoric found elsewhere in this collection.

Robin Skelton's *Callsigns*¹³ is an earlier and better book than *Because of Love*, which I reviewed last time. A loosely connected series of poems exploring his sense that 'the aether around all of us is always busy with messages,' *Callsigns* is occasionally very good in its representation of these messages. It is least successful, mostly in the middle section, where Skelton tries once again to weave his sexual encounters into a web of the White Goddess's making. Indeed, Skelton insists on writing Musepoems and sex poems despite the fact that in them he is almost always paralytically conventional. But in the first and last sections of the book, especially in the title poem and a group of poems dedicated to other artists, he does manage to capture the feeling of perceiving a universe full of messages, in all we see or hear. This feeling pushes his poetry toward an openness of expression not found in his Musepoems, as *Because of Love* so clearly reveals. Thus I'm sorry that book is later than *Callsigns*, since that suggests he's trying to work a vein less intrinsically interesting than the one explored in its best poems.

Another year has passed and another Irving Layton collection tumbles onto the bookshelves. Despite his vehement protestations that he is out to 'avoid the rant and rubbish taken for poetry by those perennial *culturati* whom poets in every age must contend against' as he dances on the tightrope between sex and death, Layton's recent books have been mostly rant, full of rubbish. One can at least say of *The Tightrope Dancer*¹⁴ that the percentage of rant has diminished. Layton has no specific issue to address, as has been the case with his last two anti-Christian books and as a result he has returned to either celebration of life

and sexuality or more general diatribes against humanity. Most of these latter are attempts to remind us of the horror of the Holocaust, a not unworthy task. Yet I must say it: Phyllis Webb's infinitely quiet and compassionate 'Treblinka Gas Chamber' speaks more urgently to the inhuman horror of the Holocaust than do all of Layton's diatribes; for one thing it is such a perfectly poised poem. But Layton is not, finally, a perfectionist; he is, rather, a man of moods and violent emotions, some of them noble, some ignoble. Here at least he celebrates life almost as often as he savages the rest of us for not enjoying it or living it Dionysiacly to the full as he does. He also addresses a group of, sometimes quite witty but often morally dumb, poems to Sir Mortimer, Death in the guise of a hired assassin. This is certainly Layton's best collection in some time, though it still isn't nearly as good as it could or should be.

Two Kinds of Honey,¹⁵ Rosemary Aubert's first book, reveals a poet who adopts the plain style with a vengeance. This can be rewarding to a degree, especially in the poems where an ordinary person's voice is sought, but there's such a thing as being too plain. At 144 pages, she gives us too many prosaic verses, lacking rhythmic energy and music. Many of her images are weak: similes rather than metaphors, too much unnecessary verbiage. This is too bad, especially when she reveals a talent for close observation, as in the description of the woman's face in 'A Nice Nuclear Family.' When she speaks for herself or in her persona, directly to others, she also achieves a noticeable voice. On the other hand, though 'A Short History of the Miseries of My Sister' is an interesting, occasionally witty story even if its targets are a bit too easy, it only moves into powerful poetry in its last lines. Aubert is most powerful when she's angry, as in 'Poets' Wives' or the marvelously nasty portrait of Ted Hughes, 'One Picture Is Worth A Thousand Facts.' But when she tries to celebrate the ordinary her language goes flaccid. Some of her love poems, especially the series on the Gray Haired Man, have their moments, but few are wholly effective. There are just too many poems here for a first book, so even the best ones are lost among the mass of lacklustre and prosaic pieces. It's too bad, but being competent and intelligent in a poem isn't quite enough any more. In a few poems, Aubert really got to me, but most of the time I just nodded and turned the page.

*Ragged Horizons*¹⁶ is Peter Trower's first large book with a major publisher and it also sports an Introduction by Al Purdy, who finds much in the work of this logger-poet to admire. Well, Trower's poems of the working life do have something to offer readers, even when their honesty of perception is blinkered by a conventional poetic Romanticism. Trower dedicates one of his poems to the bar-singer Tom Waits and the affinity that dedication testifies to is real. Nevertheless, I find Trower falling down precisely where Waits does in his evocations of work or Saturday night: he will offer a stanza that is brilliant in its evocation of the job or of the way losers behave with some money in their pockets, and then he will undercut that terrible honesty by reaching for a 'poetic' effect that simply sentimentalizes the perception the poem has

achieved. As well, time after time, I felt Trower weakened his work with similes where metaphors would have been stronger. Notwithstanding these limitations, this is an interesting and occasionally powerful collection of poems. Trower's feelings for the woods he has ravaged as a worker are genuine, as are his sad memories of a life wasted in bars and drunk tanks, even if his expression of them isn't, always. And occasionally, in poems like 'Relearning Winter,' 'The Ravens' and most of 'The Sea Runs Diagonally,' he achieves a purity of diction and specificity that the reader of poetry can only be grateful for. *Ragged Horizons* is a definitely mixed bag, but its few good poems deserve your attention.

It's possible I'm being entirely unfair to Barry Callaghan's first book, *The Hogg Poems and Drawings*,¹⁷ in refusing to join the chorus of praise on the back cover for this 'major breakthrough in modern Canadian poetry,' a poem to be compared to *Crow* by Ted Hughes and other foreign biggies. The problem with such praises is they set up expectations; expectations which only the finest work can meet. This is Callaghan's first book and though it's occasionally more than merely competent it sure isn't all that good. Hogg is an Everyman figure who makes a spiritual journey through a Jewish and Christian geography of ikons to discover in the stations of the Toronto (Hogtown) subway reason enough to celebrate being 'alive to hope as more than survival,/to prayer as more than madness, to death/as more than a sigh.' Gee. Callaghan is a learned, occasionally witty, writer; I have no doubts essays could be written on the patterns of meaning, the structure of allusions or the thematic complexity of his book. I, however, won't write them, simply because there is not enough of the energy of language I respond to here to call me back with renewed interest to further readings. Everything is in the right place but it seems to lack sufficient animation, though it obviously succeeded for the readers on the back cover. But that sounds too mean, too negative a note. Callaghan brings off a number of individual poems with brio, though an equal number are either too prosaic or fail in their attempts to characterize their speakers through specialized idioms, like jazz or pimp talk, which sounds a bit too rehearsed to me. The reference to *Crow* does help us to evaluate *The Hogg Poems*. Like them or hate them, one finds in *Crow* a figure of truly mythical force; Hogg lacks *Crow*'s archetypal presence and thus he lacks *Crow*'s power. Hogg's Drawings are perhaps more forceful in their inchoate and ugly representations of living landscapes and animal people than the poems are. *The Hogg Poems and Drawings* is an interesting first book but it's not the 'rare event' its publicity claims.

Arthur Adamson teaches English Literature at the University of Manitoba and *The Inside Animal*¹⁸ both benefits and suffers from the particular academic background he brings to his writing. The author's note mentions his love for both the Grimm Brothers and Blake; when the former enter the poems all is well but when the latter and his literary colleagues do things begin to get perversely pretentious. The first selection of the book, 'Night,' contains some fine nightmarish poems. As he sees in 'The Angel', 'Thought can crack

skulls,/break swift bodies of animals,/all images haunting sleep', and it is this sense of those images haunting sleep which animates these poems. When, elsewhere, Adamson too carefully alludes to Hamlet, Faust, Medea or Iago, the poems fall flat; they become mere academic exercises, however well meant their feelings. Adamson does have a good visual sense and his seasonal, landscape poems are often beautifully evocative. Arthur Adamson is a poet who owes more to the Eliot tradition than to the more interesting Pound-Williams-Olson one. At their best, these poems achieve an archetypal simplicity that makes them well worth your attention; at their worst they achieve nothing more than an archetypal silliness. Overall, however, *The Inside Animal* is an interesting collection, the poems enhanced by Adamson's often striking woodcuts.

David West's first book, *Franklin and McClintock*,¹⁹ is yet another poem sequence concerning epic events in the exploration of our country. Specifically, it presents the story of Franklin's tragic search for a northwest passage and McClintock's later discovery of what happened to him. Beautifully illustrated with woodcuts from McClintock's *A Narrative of the Discovery of the Fate of Sir John Franklin and His Companions* (1860), photographs and maps, and moving through a variety of poetic modes more or less well handled, it records the terrible ironies of both voyages.

When West writes plainly and simply, as in poems like 'Constitutional' in the personal of Franklin, 'McClintock, Sledging,' or the fine found poem 'foot-note,' he achieves real power; all too often, however, he is given to pretentious attempts at heavy, fateful irony, as in the poem about Franklin's preparations in Tasmania for his northward journey, and these appear forced, even when they make their didactic points. On the whole, the poems get better, that is tighter, tauter, plainer, as they follow the protagonists into the dark northern ice. Despite its flaws, *Franklin and McClintock* is an interesting addition to the group of documentary poem sequences about the courageous and foolish heroes of our colonial past.

David West's second collection, *Poems and Elegies, 1972-1977*²⁰ lacks the unifying focus of *Franklin and McClintock* but it shares that book's flaws as well as its successes. West is a competent young poet but he often gets pretentious and lacks the wit to carry his pretensions off. Some of his imagist pieces are good, mainly because he keeps them short and tight. 'Radio AM,' a meditation on loneliness perceived in talk shows, also achieves emotional validity, as do a number of the elegies towards the end, where West eschews all pretentiousness as genuine feeling compels a pared, pure language. On the other hand, the abstract and formal 'Elegy in August' is forced and sentimental. West is capable of good work but he too often gives in to an impulse to the decorative.

The title poem of Christopher Levenson's *The Journey Back and Other Poems*²¹ is an ambitious attempt to deal with the modern figure of the artist-as-exile, as represented by Bela Bartok. Levenson's poem is addressed to Bartok in his final exile, but also engages the poet's personal mapping of Bartok's lost

Hungary and attempts to explore the problematics of authentic folk culture in a world of transistors and Ethnographic Museums. Levenson is an articulate and intelligent writer, and this poem is interesting on all its levels. The rest of the collection is made up of a variety of lyrics, on the subject of slowly becoming a Canadian; on snow and other wintry facts of life; on how, still, as 'Polyglot' puts it, 'No-one feels at home everywhere'; on the birth of children and the death of fathers. Levenson handles all these themes with great competence, occasional good humour and sometimes, a real depth of feeling.

I still think Eldon Grier is a visual artist first and foremost, so it does not surprise me that the most interesting poems in *The Assassination of Colour*²² are those concerning other painters or those in which his own visual sensitivities are allowed free rein. It's a kind of verse diary in which memories, events of the day, letters to friends and notes on whatever Grier is currently interested in follow upon one another with little concern for any specific order. As he has lived a long and rich life, much of what Grier has to say is intrinsically interesting. There is a strong didactic and critical streak in him, however, and I find it often takes over the poems in detrimental fashion, while I can't relate to the 'superior' mean-spirited critiques of 'Doctor David Suzuki' or 'Gary Snyder.' Many of the memory poems, in contrast, are warm and humane, full of insight and intensity of vision. Because *The Assassination of Colour* is such a large and varied collection, it contains something for almost every reader. Grier has been around for a long time, and he's an observant and intelligent man. As a result, he often speaks with real authority. I sometimes think that authority would find a better voice in essays than in poems, but there are enough good poems here to make the book worthwhile despite that fact.

*Some of the Cat Poems*²³ is, as its title suggests, a light and entertaining little book. Artie Gold's usual comic energy is given free rein in the best of these poems, as he observes and reflects upon his cats. The weakest poems, in fact, are those in which the concept, cat, functions simply as metaphor or symbol. Far better, both for the specificity of perception and the droll play with language, are those in which the cats are first and foremost cats, acting as we all recognize cats will act. This is a small collection that has no pretensions to be anything more than light entertainment, but it succeeds admirably as such and that's not a bad thing at all.

Like his previous two books, Robert Flanagan's *Gravity*²⁴ is a kind of sequence of short, gnomic utterances. As the back cover quotes point out, Flanagan has been praised for 'economy, and precision of words,' for 'clarity and severity' of language and also for a large 'fullness, complexity and range of feeling.' I must admit to the economy and severity, but I'm not so sure about the clarity nor about the range of feeling, as I tend to feel somewhat claustrophobic in his books, feel that the space is too small and that too much has been left out. *Gravity* suggests a fall, and the three sections of this book, 'directions/realizations,' 'street-addict's condition' and 'coming and going' appear to record a long fall from birth to death. Much of Flanagan's admittedly extremely

tight verse remains opaque to me, but there are some good moments. Yet despite the economy and occasional precision of language, too often the rhythm and sound remains bland, uninteresting. Although 'Passive-active hostility,/Maintenance fixates the good citizens' is undoubtedly the worst couplet in the book, it is not alone. On the other hand the prose poem on political conventions is witty and clear, and the final section, narrating a sexual liaison going sour, works as a coherent sequence, containing some strongly bitter lyrics. *Gravity* seems to be a book by a writer who still tries to use language in a true referential manner, yet has attempted to slice away so much perceived fat he has often cut off the significance of his speech as well. I like parts of it but the whole never finally comes truly alive for me.

Charles Noble's first book, *Haywire Rainbow*,²⁵ introduces a new talent with a fey and somewhat slapstick way with language. Noble's poems are his own; terms like absurd, surreal or experimental simply don't do them justice. But some of them remain flat and opaque on the page while others, equally at odds with traditional syntax and meaning, are quite delightfully entertaining. Many of these poems begin in colloquial reality ('Safeway is just across the street,' 'the teacher slumps in her chair,' 'He turned the ignition,' for example) only to skew one way or another towards extravagant fantasy ('six people in a bag/trying to get out of mouse costumes,' 'she has died,' or 'On went the windshield/wiper next and irrigated, the neighbours' countless, chick weeds each, with a haywire rainbow'). When it works this process has a liberating effect, as in the move in 'Right Through School' from the natural, if hated schoolroom, to the vision of an occupying army destroying it, a perfect fantasy for the schoolkid. When it doesn't seem to go anywhere, when the poem appears to stop in the midst of linguistic hi-jinks, rather than reach some kind of conclusion, my response is so what. That Noble has a wild imagination and a way with outré metaphors is obvious. That he is often too self-indulgent and fails to discipline his talents towards a truly communicative poetry also seems obvious. *Haywire Rainbow* is a flawed but interesting and often entertaining collection of deliberately strange poems.

George Amabile's *Flower and Song*²⁶ is a poetic record of some time spent in Mexico, trying to enter the experience of the country's past and present. Amabile's verse, colloquial and perceptively descriptive, engages most of his material in a manner both lively and entertaining. The prose notes of explanation are helpful, on the whole. Beginning with travel, the poems at first look outward, to the place and the people who inhabit it. Various myths and legends also find a place in Amabile's poems. Towards the middle, however, he enters the place and the poems as protagonist, and the result is ambiguous. A poem like 'Machismo' presents an interesting story, but the lack of irony in its acceptance of the Mexican ideal of manhood, like the uncritical praise of a bullfighter in a later poem, seems somewhat simplistically Hemingwayesque to me (other readers may enjoy these poems for precisely this reason). I prefer the comedy of 'The Fine,' as an example of Amabile's control of the verseconte

form. On the whole, *Flower and Song* is an interesting and lively collection.

John Ferns has selected those poems from 1965 to 1975 which he wishes to keep for *The Snow Horses*.²⁷ A collection of mostly shorter lyrics, *The Snow Horses* ranges wider but lacks the mythic/documentary power of Fern's earlier *Henry Hudson or Discovery*. Divided into 3 parts, 'Animals,' 'Objects, Times, Places' and 'People,' the book reveals a sharply observant mind, a wealth of learning and an intelligence at work. Nevertheless, though I am moved to agree with much of what Ferns says, I am also bothered by a sense of emotional distance dependent upon too great a focus on idea in many of these poems. The best poems in *The Snow Horses* are in the 'People' section, especially a few poems on Henry Hudson and a lengthy engagement with the ghost of John Franklin. Ferns, a Canadian who has spent 15 years outside the country, discovers a powerful emotional affinity with earlier explorers that energizes his poems on or to them in ways I find lacking in his always competent but sometimes lacklustre poems on other subjects.

M.C. Warrior is another logger/poet from B.C. and so his first book, *Quitting Time*,²⁸ is full of poems engendered by his working life in the bush. The title poem is a superbly laconic representation of the workers' everlasting wish to be elsewhere, away from 'this life spent waiting/for the slack-off whistle to blow.' Its combination of logging idioms, ordinary speech and spare natural imagery reveals what Warrior does best in the best of his poems. There are a number of weak poems in this book, poems which either don't clearly capture their subjects or poems which too obviously explain their didactic political points. On the other hand, Warrior's politics emerge from his working life and are sometimes the occasion of a brilliant poem, like 'Shut Down' in which his logging experience is carefully juxtaposed to the experience of the victims of Chilean fascism and to his feelings as a writer. The quiet understatement of 'After the Cover Photograph of John Coltrane: His Greatest Years' makes it another worthwhile poem. Despite the flaws in some of the poems in *Quitting Time*, then, it's a fine collection from a perspective too few poets know.

Les Arnold's *Some Notes on the Paintings of Francis Bacon*²⁹ is a small pamphlet but it packs a lot of punch, as do the paintings it so carefully alludes to. In fact, it is apparently based on a single painting, 'Man in Blue V 1954,' for the sequence begins with that man, 'his smudged hand. his/face was once painted but/had been defaced, one eye remains.' It begins with the painting but rapidly and with savage irony imagines the woman, the conversations, the affair and the problems that such a man—'he's not a goddam/cripple just because/he's only got one/eye and somebody rubbed out most of his face'-might meet. The poem is filled with a black humour appropriate to Bacon's paintings, I think, and although not a large work it suggests that Les Arnold is continuing to develop his talent.

Lazar Sarna, probably best known for his novel, *The Man Who Lived Near Nelligan*, is a lawyer and his concern with laws and politics can be found in every poem of *Letters of State*.³⁰ his new collection of verse. It begins with

'Memoirs of an Elder Statesman,' an occasionally witty, too often prosaic attempt to deal satirically with such a figure. But things tend to improve: 'Poet as Leader' is often obvious but its final presentation of the tongue as a series of metaphorical possibilities has genuine power; 'City Letters' contains some strong imagery; 'A Beast's Government' is interesting though too reminiscent of other versions of the theme; 'Food' is quite witty though its analogies are finally overdone; and 'Birthday Letter' doesn't quite pull off its surrealistic imagery. Yet all these poems reveal flashes of wit and intelligence. The longest piece in the book, 'Camilien Houde and the Convict,' a mixture of prose and poetry, is also the best. Full of precise observation of life in Montreal and engaging its comparison of Montreal's mayor in 1940 and an escaped convict in 1953 at all points, it shows Sarna at his best (and, I suspect, most lawyerly). *Letters of State* is an interesting, if somewhat flawed, little book, and in its attempts to deal with political realities and forces it explores important material.

Michael Carmichael's a wholly new poet to me, but his *Oyster Wine*³¹ demonstrates an idiomatic vitality and a love for outrageous character that bodes well for the future. It's a sequence of poems concerning the life of one Dirty Bob, a West Coast fisherman now dead. Essentially a series of almost cinematic 'takes' on Dirty Bob's actions at various times, it hooks us in immediately with a visceral rendition of Dirty Bob's attempts to pull his own teeth with pliers; and we have met our man, an original, a 'character.' As such, he represents the place, Redonda Bay, and the life of the boats. On the whole, Carmichael's handling of remembered conversations, recalled events and specific descriptions is more than competent. The juxtapositions build to a scene between the narrator and the old man in which the oysters of the title achieve some kind of apotheosis. *Oyster Wine* is not a major work and there are some awkwardly handled passages, but its energy and obvious delight in its portrayal of an old roustabout fisherman make it an entertaining and engaging book.

In two longer sequences in his new book, *All This Night Long*,³² Robert Gibbs achieves some marvelously realized poems of voice and dreams beyond anything he has previously written. They make the book. The shorter poems are a mixed bag: some, like the poem for Klein or the final poem, accomplished and interesting; some, like the elegy for Pat Lowther, heartfelt but somehow not quite right.

In the twenty 'Morning Songs,' Gibbs experiments with sound patterns, linguistic games and spoken idiom in an often arresting and delightful manner. Not all twenty are equally engaging, but the whole sequence has real power. I especially like the conversational pieces, where Gibbs utilizes his own laconic speech to marvelous effect. The 'Verse Journal' is also twenty sections long and it too represents an attempt to break free of the simple lyric impulse into something both broader in scope and more immersed in daily thought. These two extended poems mark a new area of endeavour for Gibbs, one I hope he will continue to explore. For the moment, they are the strength of *All This Night Long*, and offer the reader a chance to experience some intriguing extended poetic perceptions of the life of mixed dream and waking.

William Bauer is a longtime Maritimer, born in Maine and living and teaching in New Brunswick for many years now. I may be wrong but I believe his particular crusty wit, a marvelously absurd sense of humour, is rooted in those eastern coastline places. At any rate, his second collection of poems, *The Terrible Word*,³³ is a delight on the whole, a collection of tall tales and comic monologues carried off with great élan. Bauer's imagination is steeped in tall tales and he handles outrageous exaggeration with just the right mixture of crafty smiles and apparently sincere earnestness to draw his readers willingly in. One section of the book is called 'A Dozen (and more) for the Children' and the comic fairy tales he concocts here are closely allied to his more 'adult' poems. 'Twelvebelly the Ogre' is a perfect ogre type, and Bauer's tone in presenting him is just right. Not all these poems are equally successful, and I must admit a lot of my delight is simply in reading a poet who can get his wild sense of humour into poems that are linguistically subtle and open in form. But Bauer cares about language, and loves it; the title poem is a poet's joke, and a good one. Moreover, the comedy is precisely his way of exploring the large questions of life as process rather than stasis, of poetry as a way to speak to others. *The Terrible Word* is not a great book but it is both damn good and damn entertaining. As such it is better than many.

Theresa Kishkan is a young poet with one chapbook to her credit, and now *Ikons of the Hunt*,³⁴ a large collection her publisher suggests will establish her 'as one of the most original and impressive poets to have emerged in this country in recent times.' Brave words, those, but they may do more damage than good; I know I take them as a challenge. Well, I must admit Kishkan certainly comes off as a better, more interesting poet than many others, but she still has some growing to do before she achieves the greatness Sono Nis would thrust upon her. Indeed, I think *Ikons of the Hunt* is too large a book, containing a number of poems which, while useful exercises for her, are not all that interesting to us. Among these I would place most of the poems based too closely on Greek mythology and the not-quite-right sestina. Kishkan does have a fine mythic sensibility, but it functions best when not tied down to particular European mythologies. Thus I find many of her charms and spells, her poems grounded in the landscapes of her native B.C., both more engaging as poems and more powerful as invocations of mythic realities than the poems to known personages. At its best, her poetry is taut, imagistic and cuttingly outspoken. 'Several for the Moon,' for example, fully exploits the moon's mythic history, but not by discussing it; instead, Kishkan assumes its imaginative power, invokes that, and thus discovers a speech by which to address it from the heart. The best poems in *Ikons of the Hunt* promise that Theresa Kishkan will perhaps one day become the poet its hype claims she already is. That promise plus its real if lesser achievement makes it a worthwhile volume.

Despite its flaws, and it does have flaws, Linda Pyke's *prisoner*³⁵ finally asserts a very real emotional power over its readers. Essentially an evocative sequence of lyrics strung on a narrative line concerning the love between a

young poet and a man in prison for murder, whom she met by correspondence, this first book makes brilliant use of legendary and conventional images of lovers and criminals from both literature and film. Indeed, it achieves its most moving and powerful moments when the poems are most fully aware of the 'artistic' precedents which this love affair follows: Abelard and Heloise, Bonnie and Clyde, Bette Davis visiting her man in prison—these images and the awareness of specific conventions which they imply heighten the erotic and emotional tension of the poems, providing a necessary ironic distancing for the reader. Paradoxically it is when Pyke speaks most nakedly as an individual that her poems tend toward sentimentality; the emotions seem somehow to have slipped her control. When she uses the kinds of allusions I have mentioned, however, or simply plays with metaphors and similes of film-making, photography and (occasionally) poetry, she achieves an ironic awareness of the complexities of her protagonists' dilemma and a precision of emotional statement that is extremely effective. Certainly these poems champion eros over thanatos, and on the whole effectively, but when she actually tells us that that is what she is doing she undercuts the force of the challenge. Nevertheless, *prisoner* has many good moments and is definitely worth reading.

I have never heard of Diane Keating before but, on the basis of *In Dark Places*³⁶ I believe we'll hear from her again. There are some weaknesses in these poems, sometimes of prosaic understatement and sometimes of too lush metaphoric overstatement, but an undeniable mythic power energizes all of them. Much of that power derives from what might be called the feminist-fairy-tale perspective employed in the best ones (it's interesting to note that all the epigraphs to individual poems are from the *Blue Fairy Book*). The book's epigraph is a reference to the minotaur from Jorge Luis Borges's *In Praise of Darkness*; a fitting allusion at the beginning of a series of explorations of the shadowy labyrinths of dreams, fears and emotional states. In highly metaphorical (and occasionally weaker similitic) language, Keating engages the various Jungian figures who inhabit her inner and outer worlds. Often she approaches surrealism but the fairy-tale context of her poems holds her strange images in a highly specific perspective. Parent figures, lovers, friends, potential enemies: all can be found in the labyrinth. It's a dark place, but you must go *through* it, it cannot be evaded. One of the book's successes is to relate the imagery of myth and fairy-tale to everyday life, as in 'Legend of a Financier,' which provides a more viable magic image of the housewife than do the modern gothic novels she usually reads. Although in *Dark Places* is an apprentice work, it already delivers on many of the promises it makes. I hope Diane Keating goes on from here to explore with even more grace and wit and power the dark labyrinths her poetry has led her to enter.

Judith Fitzgerald's second book, *Lacerating Heartwood*,³⁷ reveals a growing talent which still occasionally fails to achieve cohesive poems. Fitzgerald has, I believe, set herself to render what, in an allusion to another poet, she calls 'the phenomenology of anger'; also, of loss, of pain, and occasionally of joy in love.

At her best she captures either the feel of certain lived moments—'touch,' 'break down,' 'defined by the van's window' and others—or a viscerally imaged emerging myth—the title poem and parts of other poems. At other times, the language seems too slippery, the poem refuses to stay in focus. If there are some failures in *Lacerating Heartwood*, at least they are not failures of nerve but rather the results of Fitzgerald's attempting a bit more than she can yet handle. More important are the successes. The prose 'journal entries,' for example, in which language and a surreal psychological vision combine to limn the outlines of a remembered love affair (although the sexual obsessiveness of the narrator leads her to misuse the verb 'lay'). The title poem is a stunning and powerful evocation of a hurt personality's withdrawal from the flux of life into a sad stasis. On the whole, Fitzgerald shows a strong capability for evoking specific emotions, often with great power. *Lacerating Heartwood* has much to offer its readers.

*Sailor*³⁸ is bill bissett's first major collection from Talonbooks and I'd have to agree with Warren Tallman's statement that it is perhaps his 'finest single volume to date.' In it, bissett explores with greater authority than ever before all the modes of poetry he has practiced over the years: chants, concrete, collage, songs, didactic and political, ordinary speech; and of course he will not 'spell correctly. for me thats another tyranny.' *Sailor* has some weak poems, usually straightforward political statements or overly sentimental 'visionary' pieces. What's really exciting about this collection, however, is how often bissett pulls off his poems with both energy and charm. He moves from near-imagist haiku-like structures like 'wand ring/swam sing,' through superbly realized memory poems with political bite like 'first reeding I evr did in/a aftr hours jazz club' and 'once i workd in a mental hospital' to powerful sound poems like 'yes' and 'sha bee ya ka uk' and tender sexual love poems like 'again th first light cum' or even the comic 'i came to bed n yu wer.' Indeed, bissett's ability to see and speak the comedy in even the most personal situations is one of the charms of many of these poems. *Sailor* is not a difficult book; if anything it might be too easy to discuss and thus dismiss. But if you give it a chance and approach it with an open mind and heart, it will tell you many things and suggest many more. bill bissett is a unique writer and the poems and drawings of *Sailor* go some way toward revealing his uniqueness in a most entertaining way.

After last year's joyful long poem, *The Poet's Progress*, David McFadden is back with a superbly entertaining collection of rich McFaddenisms, *On the Road Again*.³⁹ The title is informative and evokes the kind of joyful energy McFadden's best poems generate. Whether he's noticing the invitations or mating rituals of trees, talking to Jesus or some northern workers, discoursing on angels or Hsü Fu, or just enjoying the scenery with friends or family, McFadden projects a persona wholly engaged in the processes of living and loving the life he leads. If his mind leads him to odd and often fantastical perceptions, well that's just how things go in the day-by-day life of a working poet. 'There has to be something mysterious about a poem./No matter how simple it may

be/there has to be something about it/that's impossible to understand/that makes you sit there wondering.' These are rather prosaic statements but they point to a key element in McFadden's poetic: his willingness to let the mysteries into his poems, whether it's the white hat 'glowing with a life of its own' which he knows he doesn't own even though a strange man insists he does or the face found in Egypt which he displays on his bookshelf. Not all these poems are equally successful (I say that a lot, don't I; I guess that's because it's true), and there are times when the notation seems flaccid. But at their best McFadden's poems bespeak the magic which participates in the most ordinary of lives, the glow of something mysterious that will lighten the day of all who perceive it. *On the Road Again* speaks to us of joy and sadness, love and what fails it, places and history, all in the unique McFadden manner. Thereby it offers us delights we would be foolish to ignore.

Having just read and immensely enjoyed R.G. Everson's *Carnival*,⁴⁰ I have been struck with the realization that he is the David McFadden of his generation. Everson is still underrated even though, in Oberon, he has a major publisher, but that's all right, he just keeps living, travelling, and committing the comic insights he discovers everywhere to the pages of his notebooks. Everson's poetry seems both effortless and almost prosaic but it is neither. It is almost metaphysical in its often incredible juxtapositions except it is too folksy and genial for that. His voice is definitely his own, quirky, loving humanity and all nature, and it speaks directly to us all. He is comic in the large philosophical sense but he also has an outrageous sense of humour as the title poem with its marvelously surreal fantasy of robins and Everson sharing a 'high' on pyracanthe berries demonstrates. Everson's great humane realism, his sense of this world and his joy in it, come through in all his poems. He does not write great lines and is therefore immune to the short quotation, but *Carnival* offers delights and moments of consideration on almost every page. These are poems we might expect Yeat's sages to give us, had they lived in Canada in the late twentieth century. Quiet, almost unassuming, but definitely worth your time for the enjoyment and insights they bring.

Doug Beardsley's third book, *Play on the Water*⁴¹ is also his best so far, a witty, playfully intelligent, formally various sequence of poems in response and homage to the drawings of Paul Klee. Since the poems are responses to specific drawings, the book offers the additional delights of reproductions of the Klee drawings opposite the poems they engendered. Beardsley has shown from the first a willingness to experiment with forms; his awareness of the many possibilities inherent in open forms serves him well here. He moves from the almost pure, yet intriguingly self-reflexive, imagery of 'Near Bern'—'A few fishing boats/line the harbours of the small village//Black straw/blown over blank paper'—to a variety of longer forms, each of which reflects upon its particular drawing. On the whole, Beardsley's choice of language is sure and reflects his awareness of the necessary ambiguities resonating in the imagery of both Klee's drawings and the words he chooses to respond to them with. In a

couple of places he chooses similes which too fully impose a particular response upon his readers, such as the reference to the snake-goddess 'shaped like woe.' Such emotionally laden generalizations are too vague; moreover, in this case, I look at the drawing and disagree; this doesn't happen very often, though. This is a minor cavil, however, when you consider the overall aural and rhythmic sophistication of the sequence. *Play on the Water* is a book of delights for the eye and the ear.

In general I simply cannot keep up with all the little mags, so a first book by a newcomer like E.J. Carson is usually wholly surprising to me. In this case, despite the slight pretentiousness of the title, *Scenes: A Book of Poems*,⁴² the surprise is delightful. Carson is an intelligent, witty, linguistically subtle and supple poet who has obviously already passed through the early stages of poetic apprenticeship with flying colours. *Scenes* is one of the strongest first books I've seen recently and possibly the best single book The Porcupine's Quill has published. Part I of *Scenes* is a group of apparently static poems taking a stand about the early Group of Seven painters. Carson speaks of posing, of people 'still motionless/like words on the page,' but later argues the paintings contain energy. The persona of this section could be Tom Thomson; at any rate he looks 'where the water calms,/shines like phosphorus/into which the final word is thrown;' and thus unites himself with Klein's 'poet as landscape.'

Part II is a group of various poems displaying wit and a care for living language that signifies a true poetic vocation. I especially like 'Courting Tree,' with its exploration of the many levels of meaning such a simple phrase as 'chestnut brown' contains, and the structural translation of Marcel Duchamp's writing in 'The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors', even 'The Large Glass,' 'Parts of a Definition.' This last poem, like the final part of the book, reveals Carson's willingness to experiment and push into new areas of poetry. Throughout, a sense of language as essentially metaphoric and allusive is present in the poems, 'poetry and metaphors/being the shape' the poet's in. Part III, 'Scenes From Before and After,' is an ambitious sequence dealing with the death, life and love of a particular person, as perceived in specific moments during and after life. There are some weak spots here, but on the whole it's a very interesting attempt to provide a kind of cubist portrait in words. *Scenes* is a powerful collection of stimulating poems from a dynamic new voice in Canadian poetry.

Fall By Fury,⁴³ on the other hand, is a powerful collection by a dynamic older voice. It's Earle Birney's first large collection of new poems in five years (though it contains a number of 'makings' from the small chapbook, *The Rugging and the Moving Times*(1976)), and Birney's reticence, in comparison to Layton, say, shows up well, for this is a very good book, indeed. Some of these poems had their genesis as far back as 1940, others as recently as January 1978. Though his fall from a tree in 1975 has slowed Birney down when he walks, it hasn't affected his poetic flights at all, unless by reminding him of his mortality it has inspired him to write, now, while he still can. The title poem records that fall

with great objectivity, until the final lines with their dreamy offer of escape from gravity by night. Indeed, many of these new poems boldly enter the dark realms of dream and unconscious knowledge by ways Birney has seldom attempted before. Not that this is a dark book; far from it. It contains sound poems, alphabeings of great visual wit, a warmth of love and humour that is wholly engaging. Birney has never written such delicate and delightful love poems, and his awareness of approaching death is almost Zen-like in its joyful acceptance of each passing day. The poems of *Fall By Fury*, in all their wide range, from a Chaucer-like look at remembered comrades from youth, through various games with words and visions of the wide world he still travels, to the dreams and love he now holds so dear, are the product of a profoundly comic vision, wise with the wisdom only a long and fully lived life can bring. It is a fine, humane collection, full of gratitude for breath to still write poems, such poems as we are grateful to be able to read.

Like Earle Birney, Al Purdy is now one of our master craftsmen; at their best his poems speak both directly to us and in a variety of often surprising ways deeply for us. *Being Alive Poems 1958-78*⁴⁴ is a rich recollection of his work, a Selected Poems whose bounty is grand indeed. There's no need, at this juncture, to rehearse Purdy's virtues, though I will recall Dennis Lee's classic evaluation, that Purdy reflects the Canadian dilemma of being 'half at home and half-spooked' here. I would add that what's most interesting about Lee's analysis is that it applies not just on the geographical/historical level but on the psychological and personal/emotional levels as well. Purdy's tone, the hesitations and subtle contraries he slowly learned to articulate in the very modulations of his line, provide the formal impetus to what he has to say. To travel through the pages of *Being Alive* then, is to visit many familiar old haunts and, more importantly, discover some marvelous things you had forgotten were there or had never seen before. A few superb poems, for example, surfaced recently only in the small chapbook from Black Moss, *A Handful of Dust*. It's good to know they'll now reach a larger audience. Purdy has occasionally been a lazy poet, and he has sometimes fallen into a formal stasis, but his best poems insist upon the need for an adventurous spirit in the flowing world. For old time readers who have read most of these before or for newcomers who will be discovering Purdy's riches for the first time, *Being Alive* is a book to enjoy, a book for all literary seasons.

Patrick Lane's *Poems New & Selected*⁴⁵ won the Governor General's Award for 1978 and though I can think of better books from that year I don't begrudge him the award. For readers who have not read much of his work before, especially the two fine chapbooks from Harbour Publishing, *Unborn Things* (1975) and *Albino Pheasants* (1977), this new book will provide an introduction to some of his finest work. Indeed, the poems from those two collections plus some of the new poems are among the best work here. Which is not to deny the power of much of the earlier work, but Lane has often tended to a rhetorical despair and what is best in his work is clear perception, straight talk. The very

real pain so many of these poems engage sometimes gets lost in a list of broken things, twisted shapes. I prefer the quick and affectionate sketches, like the one of 'The Carpenter' who's teaching Lane the trade, or the mesmerizing visions, like that of 'Albino Pheasants,' truly one of his finest poems. There are many powerful, emotionally wrenching poems here, yet I occasionally have the feeling reading them that the emotions are too unspecific, somehow not quite emerging from the poem so much as pushed into it. Still, at his best Lane touches us in a manner we cannot ignore. *Poems New and Selected* is the statement of a man in mid-career; what is best about it is the way the recent poems point forward to new growth and even better poems to come.

Although Jeni Couzyn deserves the praises she has earned from fellow poets, she is as capable as the rest of us of silly poems. *House of Changes*⁴⁶ has a few of those, most especially a pair on lesbianism which strike me as willfully wrongheaded in their use of malicious and fearful pop myths concerning lesbians, but its best poems are very fine indeed, and there's more than enough of them to make up for the lapses. In *Christmas in Africa*, Couzyn revitalized the form of the 'grace' with a group of warmly erotic versions of the mode. In *House of Changes* she puts her technical virtuosity to work on 'spells.' Spells, however, are a more static form than are graces, and there are simply too many similar ones here; individually they're all well done but in aggregate they lose their innovative power. Nevertheless, they provide an intriguing look at the possibilities still inherent in abandoned forms of poetic address. But Couzyn can do far better than this, and she does. Once again science fiction provides images and metaphors, as in the obvious 'Do Androids Dream' and in the incredibly moving sequence on Karen Quinlan, 'Karen Dreaming,' surely one of her most powerful poems. Elsewhere, in the title poem and 'The Tarantula Dance,' most specifically, she creates little fables of feminist visions, full of dark humour and visceral violence. Her language in such poems is purer, more tautly metaphoric, than it is in some of the spells and elsewhere. These are poems to reread. None of the poems in this book are really poor, Couzyn is too good a poet for that, but *House of Changes* is only as good as Couzyn is capable of about half the time. That still makes it a book worth savouring.

As Don McKay's two previous books have demonstrated, he's an accomplished and nervy writer. *Lependu*,⁴⁷ his prose/poetry sequence on the hanged man of London, Ontario, can only bolster his reputation. It begins with Lependu still hanging around London, a century and a half after Cornelius Burleigh became the first and second man to be hanged there (the rope broke on the first try). The comic possibilities in Burleigh's ancient predicament and present memory are great and McKay explores them all in a zesty and blackly humorous series of poetic confrontations. Burleigh was a sinful man for 1830 we are told, that is he was a sensualist who lived in the here and now. Lependu continues to represent precisely that threat. Both a Reverend Jackson and a Professor Fowler, phrenologist, point out how flawed his character was. But London killed him simply for living too well and he hangs about yet, it seems,

because London has continued to do well by death, as the massive offices of London Life prove. The argument of the book is complex, involving the historical Burleigh, the mythical figure of Lependu, the legendary presences of Indians and early explorers and exploiters and the people the poet observes and knows in the present. How they all interact and what their interactions signify of living and dying in London are the burden of the whole complicated series. McKay handles a variety of forms with both energy and intelligence, and he engages us throughout with his wit. Complex and subtle, Lependu is also richly diverting and various; a book worth knowing.

'Travel is dangerous; nevertheless we travel,' says Margaret Atwood in *Two-Headed Poems*,⁴⁸ a book which through such affirmative action explores a wider range of moods as well as situations than we are used to finding in her work. Oh, the familiar landscape paranoia is here, and rightly so as the poems of news and history indicate. The world remains a dangerous, duplicitous place, never to be wholly trusted. Check the stories of friends or the woman who married a hangman; check the story of the ordinary man, who 'only/cleans the floor:/every morning the same vomit,' who figures as a compassionately perceived lost soul in 'Footnote to the Amnesty Report on Torture;' check as well the often sly terrors which disguise themselves to tempt her daughter into dangerous traps. But it is precisely her daughter who has possibly made Atwood aware of the 'procession/of old leathery mothers/ . . . passing the work from hand to hand,/mother to daughter,//a long thread of red blood, not yet broken.' The connections backwards to grandmothers and forward to daughter are connections in time and in the body: to recognize them is to acknowledge and accept the world. In poem after poem Atwood accepts the world, the apples, for instance, which 'condense again/out of nothing on their stems/like the tree bleeding; something/has this compassion.' Because of the hard-won affirmations the best poems of *Two-Headed Poems* articulate, it achieves a positive resonance seldom reached in earlier collections. They are honest affirmations and they don't falsify the very real dangers which surround us. But the clarity and compassion of a poem like 'All Bread' truly sings humanity's place in a living world. It is a song to be grateful for.

Brian Fawcett's *Creatures of State*⁴⁹ is a flawed but powerful book far more deserving of attention than many superficially more artful examples of poetic craft. As the very title implies, Fawcett is attempting a poetry which will operate on public and political levels even as it maintains a lyric energy. The cover note argues that this book 'marks a significant departure from earlier published work in its insistence at all times on a public imagination free from both the egocentric perspective of lyric poetry and the closures of ideology.' Not 'at all times,' I'm afraid; the lyric ego sometimes intrudes, and not always to the poems' detriment; more damaging to the effective power of the whole, perhaps, 'the closures of ideology' too often fence the poems in, lock them away from all but the politically converted, as is the case with the unfortunate 'The Fall of Saigon.' I tend to agree with Fawcett's political vision, but even so it ruins the

poetry when it achieves dogmatic insistence. As he seems to realize when he says, 'I'd like/to commit Dialectical Materialism & Anita Bryant/to the Hell's Angels for two weeks/to see if they come out less charged/with that certainty that is abuse/to the mind & its astonishment/in the world.' When he renders the passionate quests of his 'mind & its astonishments/in the world,' Fawcett offers us a poetry of liberation and subversive power. His questioning of what is from the perspectives of utopian possibility, the Angel City, the growing world allowed to live by a humanity joined as family, the interactions of people become communion/community, rather than compulsive aggrandisement, accounts for his best pieces here. Although some of the pieces in *Creatures of State* utterly fail to escape dogmatic language and its too obvious political intent, most of them at least occasionally rise above that and at least half of them offer heartfelt perceptions of real lives which the poet rightly insists we must know and acknowledge before any change is possible. The honesty of his vision, combined with that always present possibility and the human hope it bespeaks, plus his often marvelous exploration of the language by which to say all this, are what make *Creatures of State* an important and moving book.

Unlike some earlier Chronicles, this one contains no single outstanding book, towards which the review has been pointing. All the books from 38 on are truly worthwhile, and many of the earlier mentioned ones are as well. Given that I don't even see all the books published in Canada every year yet still read well over a hundred, the number of worthwhile ones is large. I think that's but one more sign of how healthy poetry is in Canada right now.

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3. Jim Brown. *Northern Light*. Vancouver: Blue Mountain Books, 1978. 82 pp. \$4.95?
4. Murray Weisgarber. *Spiral Waves Whirling Motions*. Vancouver: Blue Mountain Books, 1978. np. \$4.95?
5. Mick Burrs. *Children On the Edge of Space*. Vancouver: Blue Mountain Books, 1978. 70 pp. \$4.95?
6. Christopher Heide. *Poems of a Very Simple Man*. Fredericton: Fiddlehead Books, 1978. 24 pp. \$2.00.
7. Gord Laurence. *Names of Thunder*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1978. 96 pp. \$5.95.
8. Mary Humphrey Baldrige. *the loneliness of the poet/housewife*. Fredericton: Fiddlehead Books, 1978. 44 pp. \$2.00.
9. Peggy Dragisic. *From the Medley*. Ilderton, Ont.: Nairn/Brick, 1978. np. \$1.75.
10. Gwen Hauser. *The Ordinary Invisible Woman*. Fredericton: Fiddlehead Books, 1978. 106 pp. \$5.00.
11. Beth Jankola. *Girl of the Golden West*. Vancouver: Intermedia Press, 1977. 16 pp. \$3.95?
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13. Robin Skelton. *Callsigns*. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1976. 96 pp.
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15. Rosemary Aubert. *Two Kinds of Honey*. Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1977. 144 pp. \$12.95/5.95.
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