

Spring 2011

RATTLE

Poetry for the 21st Century

Book Interview:
Susan McMaster, ed.
Pith & Wry

Colin Ward
Pixil Poetry: A Meritocracy

Review of
Grasshopper: The Poetry of M.A. Griffiths

Photography by Louis Phillips

Issue #35 Preview

e.10



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by
Louis Phillips

ABOUT THE ARTIST



LOUIS PHILLIPS, a widely published poet, playwright, and short story writer, has written some 45 books for children and adults. Among his works are four collections of short stories, including *A Dream of Countries Where No One Dare Live* (SMU Press), *The Bus to the Moon* (Fort Schuyler Press), and *The Woman Who Wrote King Lear and Other Stories* (Pleasure Boat Studio); *Hot Corner*, a collection of his baseball writings, and *R.I.P.*, a sequence of poems about Rip Van Winkle, from Livingston Press; *The Envoi Messages* and *The Last of the Marx Brothers' Writers*, full-length plays (Broadway Play Publishers). His books for children include *The Man Who Stole the Atlantic Ocean* (Prentice Hall & Camelot Books), *The Million Dollar Potato* (Simon and Schuster), and *How to Wrestle an Alligator* (Avon). His sequence of poems, *The Time, The Hour, The Solitariness of the Place*, was the co-winner in the Swallow's Tale Press competition (1984). Among his other published books of poems are *The Crazy Kat Rag* (Light Reprint Press), *Bulkington* (Hollow Spring Press), *Celebrations & Bewilderments* (Fragments Press), *In the Field of Broken Hearts*, and *Into the Well of Knowingness* (Prologue Press). His most recent books are *Gertrude Stein in Dayton & Other Plays* and *American Elegies* (World Audience, Inc.), and *Fireworks in Some Particulars* (Fort Schuyler Press). He teaches at the School of Visual Arts in New York City.



Lauren Schmidt

WHY I AM NOT A TAXIDERMIST

I am not a taxidermist, I am afraid of John Wayne.
A guest at Uncle's house, I slept in The John Wayne Room.
It was called The John Wayne Room as if a room
such as this could have another name: a life-size
cardboard form of John Wayne in the Western
She Wore a Yellow Ribbon. The plot not to be confused
with that story where the woman's head falls off
as her husband unties the ribbon's silky knot secured
around her neck. The secret she kept her whole life
from the man she loved, a private strangeness
such as having, in your home, The John Wayne Room.

Egyptians dehydrated the human body by extracting
soft tissues. The torso, left intact so the soul, an airy thing,
could find its likeness in the afterlife. In this room,
John Wayne's soul would have a number of likenesses
to confuse for the original John Wayne. The most alarming
of which is the John in a Box which is just as it sounds
except that it was not a box but a buck with a tail
for a crank, then: Pop goes the John Wayne.

Who thought of this is less disturbing than who would
buy this except I know the answer. *I would have
John Wayne stuffed and mounted in The John Wayne Room
to look at when I'm an old man*, Uncle declared.
I am not a taxidermist because I read "A Rose for Emily"
in high school and I know the need to keep something,
everything, long after it is gone, like youth, like love,
the longing to take it all with me because what is memory if not
the cadence of colliding, forgotten things, cymbals
that tempt a tremor from the body's core and wake

that thing inside? I am not a taxidermist because I would stuff
my dog the time he got his head stuck in the railing
of our stoop. His leather tongue lapped happily at his dish
as sparks darted around his head from the iron cutters
like the squirrels he was about to chase, mad with desire.
I am not a taxidermist because I would pull the skin
off the kind of sleep I got as a kid, drape it around me
so I could remember what it's like to be ten again.
I would freeze-dry the first time I let music move inside me
like a sinuous being, fit to romp for days. Yes, the sadness

THE 2011 NEIL POSTMAN AWARD FOR METAPHOR

*In honor and remembrance of Neil Postman, who died on
October 5th, 2003, we have established the Neil Postman Award
for Metaphor. The intention of the award is simple and two-fold:
To reward a given writer for his or her use of metaphor and to
celebrate (and, hopefully, propagate) Postman's work, and the
typographical mind. Each year the editors will choose one poem
from all of the submissions RATTLE received during the previous
year. There are no entry fees or submission guidelines involved.
The author of the chosen poem receives \$500.*

*RATTLE is proud to announce the 2011 Neil Postman Award for
Metaphor Winner, Lauren Schmidt for her poem "Why I Am Not
a Taxidermist."*

of these things gone, but I am not a taxidermist
because how do I find the exact eyes Tracey had,
shiny with tears, shaking, when she looked at me,
her father's fist blued into the knob of her chin?
Or her body the night she huddled beneath my porch light
over a spread of Gin Rummy at midnight, that terrible hand
just across the street. Then the girl with the strange name
in ninth grade, the girl with those cheeks, pocked and red
and puss-capped, that frantic hair, I would mount her
on a shelf so I could look at her, wonder why I wasn't nicer.

I am not a taxidermist because I would cast all the women
from now that I might never get to be, shake my fist at them
and demand a list of failures. I am not a taxidermist because
one day I would sit surrounded in my John Wayne Room
of All I Wished Forgotten. People in town would wonder
about me, rumor what they don't know. And I,
an old lady in a rocking chair, would stare stolidly
at the hybrid creature of trauma and whiskey sickness,
the griffin myth of if I woke to her groping me
the way I swore she did while I stirred from sleep
in my dormitory bed. Too afraid then, to confront
that beast, now I'd stuff it, I'd give it back its teeth.

—from RATTLE #34, Winter 2010



PITH & WRY CANADIAN POETS

Edited by

Susan McMaster

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Sudbury, Ontario
Canada P3E 2R2
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FROM THE PUBLISHER

In *Pith & Wry: Canadian Poetry* highly respected poet and editor Susan McMaster brings together 40 active, well-established Canadian poets from coast to coast who have a stake in their communities and country, and whose direct, human voices call their fellow citizens into a broadened horizon.

The contributors include Sylvia Adams, Cameron Anstee, Margaret Atwood, Ronnie R. Brown, Jan Conn, Lorna Crozier, Kat Eichhorn, Marty Gervais, Katia Grubisic, Maureen Scott Harris, Penn Kemp, Ben Ladouceur, John B. Lee, Alice Major, Blaine Marchand, Dave Margoshes, Don McKay, Susan McMaster, Colin Morton, Mary Ann Mulhern, Roger Nash, Marilyn Gear Pilling, Claudia Coutu Radmore, Monty Reid, Grant D. Savage, Rachael Simpson, Carolyn Smart, and Betsy Struthers.

PRAISE FOR PITH & WRY

“ There is a celebratory feel to *Pith & Wry: Canadian Poetry* that begins with Susan McMaster's editorial preface. ... McMaster speaks of the society in which the writers developed, identifying Canada as a rich venue for poetry. ... Our land is vast, our stories, myriad. And breath is spare. When we call across such distances, we need always use our best words. *Pith & Wry* does just that.

—M. E. Csamer in *Antigonish Review*

Ottawa poet SUSAN McMASTER, currently Vice-President of the League of Canadian Poets, is the author or editor of some twenty poetry books and recordings with First Draft, SugarBeat, and Geode Music & Poetry. She is the founding editor of Canada's first feminist magazine, *Branching Out*, and of *Vernissage: The Magazine of the National Gallery of Canada*, and has organized such projects as “Dangerous Graces: Women's Poetry on Stage” and “Convergence: Poems for Peace,” which brought poetry from across the country to Parliament Hill. This year, she is launching three books: *Crossing Arcs: Alzheimer's, My Mother, and Me* (Black Moss 2009/10), a finalist for three prestigious awards, *Paper Affair: Poems Selected & New* (Black Moss 2010), which collects 25 years of the best of McMaster's poetry; and *Pith and Wry: Canadian Poetry* (Scrivener Press 2010).



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Note: One book feature appears in each issue, every fall and spring, including an interview with the author and sample poems. If you'd like your book to be considered for a feature, send a copy to: Rattle, 12411 Ventura Blvd, Studio City, CA 91604. All books not selected for a feature will be considered for a traditional review.

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BOOK INTERVIEW WITH SUSAN McMASTER

by
Timothy Green

Note: The following interview was conducted by email through February and March of 2011.

GREEN: *Pith & Wry* seems to be more personal than the typical anthology—you write in the preface that this is simply a collection of poets whose work you admire, the “peers, companions, critics, and mentors” you’ve had “throughout [your] writing life.” I also noticed that a large portion of the poets hail from your home town of Ottawa. The effect for me—and maybe I was reading too much into this—was like being on a guided tour through *your* literary Canada, as if it were almost an avant-garde form of autobiography. Or maybe genealogy. So tell me about yourself. How did you come to be someone who writes and enjoys poetry? As far as I can tell, poetry is as under-appreciated in Canada as it is in the States... What drew you to it in the first place?

McMASTER: Now that is an interesting light on the anthology, and of course you are correct—this is a kind of gathering together of my writing experience, a way of enjoying and talking with all my poetry friends—who of course can also be people I’ve never met, but whose work flashes right through me from hair standing on end to shaking fingertips to toes suddenly flushed with fire. Not to forget the gut and genitals and gurgling heart and momentarily gasping lungs in between.

Which is a short way of saying how/why I write poetry. I don’t remember when my journey towards the

form began. My mother sang, all the time, and we sang, on long trips to see relatives and back, out camping in the woods, as we worked, and you can hear song forms hidden behind many of my lines. She was also a painter—visual images pervade my writing. And my father loved poetry. I was the first child, he read it to me before I could do more than bounce around to the timbres and rhythms—or so he tells me. As I grew older, he would read me a favorite and ask my opinion—ask my four-year-old and eight-year-old and ten-year-old opinion—of whether it was any good and why and what it meant. Around age twelve those talks faded away: I had five siblings by then, and there wasn’t space left in either parents’ day for the luxury of philosophical discussion. But by then the idea that poetry was the centre of language had drilled itself into my every artery.

So when I wanted to express the anguish of teenage-hood—and I’m sure my teenage-hood was so much worse than anyone else’s!—I turned to poetry. When I wrote a poem, it was a secret, it was mine, my personal way of making sense of chaos, a private gift; it felt like a Christmas stocking waiting to be opened whenever I picked up a pen.

Most scribbling teenagers probably feel like that. Eventually I sent a poem off, one, and it got rejected. So I gave up. Didn’t try again for fifteen years. But I did begin to attend some writing work-

shops (ooh, those sexy instructors, real living poets!), one at Free University North in Edmonton, and another with Doug Barbour and W.O. Mitchell at the University of Alberta, and later with Miriam Waddington, Chris Levenson, even just a few years ago, Fred Wah at Sage Hill. And I took courses in poetry. I had one professor, nervous and funny looking to callous student eyes, Trevor Tolley, who could hardly even be heard in class until he started to read a poem: and then we froze like icicles in sun. Transfixed. Melting. I learned at his death much later that many, many students had been as affected as I was.

The courses and workshops led me to readings, and open readings, and submissions and rejections and finally just enough acceptances to let me step shyly out of the closet. Once I did, I was lucky indeed to find as a friend and mentor first bpNichol, and then Bronwen Wallace—both astonishing and generous poets, and both, most sadly, dead a few years after I met them, each at the age of 44.

There were other clear moments along the way, shudders and shivers of electricity when I read or heard a good poem. There’s one I remember above all, as vivid today as when it happened. I’d gone to hear Anne Szumigalski—long dead now or she’d surely be front and centre in *Pith & Wry*. She read her poem “Shrapnel,” about a young man dying in a war, hearing the bees buzz nearby and thinking of...

his wife’s secret he wants to part her legs
and touch her glistening vermilion
lining
now at last he understands
why he loves the bodies of women
more than the bodies of men for pale
skin covers
a man all over and only a wound can
show his lining¹

When lines like that exist, how can I possibly do anything with my life but write poetry?

Walking home, I stopped in the spring night along the canal and wrote a poem in pencil on a scrap of paper, and



BOOK FEATURE - PITH & WRY

yes, sometimes it does happen that way, that starts, “to admit the draw of starlight” and ends “crayfish / bared in the spring mud / their claws / their fishy smell.” Whenever I reread that poem, I remember why I write...

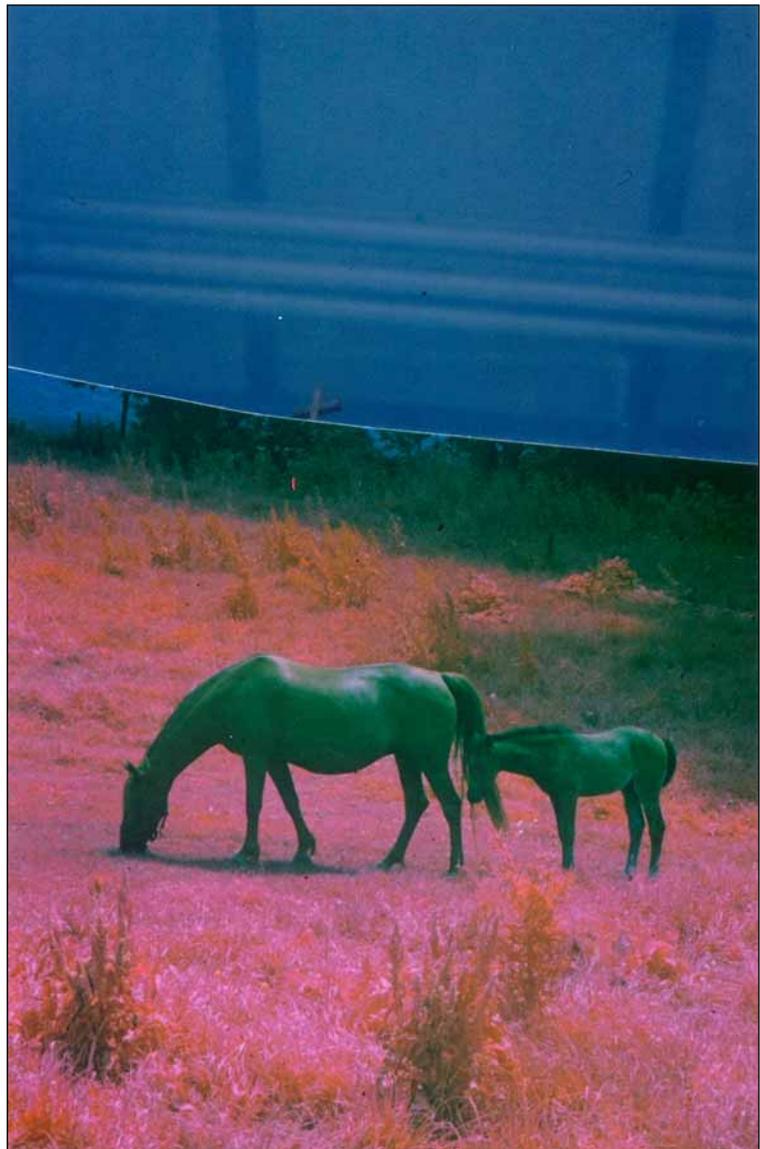
GREEN: “...only a wound can show his lining.” What an amazing line that is. And it inspired that scrap-of-paper-poem, and here we are, over a dozen books and anthologies later. Now tell me about the origins of *Pith & Wry*—I understand it started when you were asked to guest-edit a special Canadian issue of *Sugar Mule*ⁱⁱ. How did you come into that role? And then later, what led you to turn the e-zine issue into a larger print anthology?

MCMASTER: Friends, and friends again. The continuing, almost casual, generosity that knits the poetry community together. Penn Kemp is a good friend and a major sound and performance poet in Canada; we’ve often worked together. One day in 2007 I got an email asking if she could include one of our duets in a new anthology on collaboration edited by her friend Sheila E. Murphy for Marc Weber, publisher of the American press SugarMule.comⁱⁱⁱ. Of course, I said, what a pleasure! Beyond casting an eye over the proofs (Penn did all the work), I thought nothing more of it until the handsome book arrived a few months later. And until Marc wrote to me wearing his alternate hat as editor of *Sugar Mule Literary Magazine*, asking for a few poems. He published them, and some time later—we’re at spring 2008 now, I think—asked if I would consider editing a Canadian issue of the magazine. I protested that I didn’t feel at all competent to produce an authoritative anthology to represent Canadian poets to the States, that anything I edited would be idiosyncratic, personal, lopsided—but he kept gently pressing me, insisting the issue could take any form I wished. As long as I made it clear this was one person’s view, what harm could it do? Flattered and out of excuses, I agreed. It took great patience and optimism on

Marc’s part over the next year and a half, plus equally great generosity from the various friends and respected writers I approached, who were to receive no payment in return for giving me their new work but thanks. I was late, I was disorganized, but finally, in November 2009, *Sugar Mule: The Canadian Issue* appeared.

And it read rather well. Lively, bumptious. My casual introduction made it clear this was a gathering of friends and mentors, with many missing, and on that

basis I felt happy to let it fly into the world via the internet. Earlier that year, my daughter and her family had moved north to Sudbury, so I re-connected with Roger Nash, who lives there (and is now Sudbury’s poet laureate). He’s in the magazine—I like his strange view of the world—and within minutes of our first post-*Sugar Mule* pot of tea together (this is Canada, you know), Roger suggested publishing the book as an anthology. Marc had earlier suggested this as well, offering to publish through Sugar Mule



Horses

Louis Phillips



BOOK FEATURE - PITH & WRY

Press on a print-on-demand basis. I resisted them both: I had far too many projects on the go, PID would cost money I didn't have and require promotion I didn't have time for, and anyway the collection of poets was not representative or authoritative. Who would buy it, what was the point, and where could I find the time and energy?

Hmmm. Roger is persuasive. He would join me in the editing and publication—besides, it would be a walk in the park, all the work was basically done. (He also sold me a share in the Brooklyn Bridge...) And Marc was all generosity: we could use the issue and layout with no more return than a credit. You see? said Roger, We'd just add a few other prominent poets if possible, we both knew Margaret Atwood and Don McKay, for example, and maybe they'd contribute... (He was right.) Besides, he knew a publisher who would take it on, so I wouldn't need to worry about printing and distribution and promotion. (...and in the Toronto Island Ferry, but I knew that was a scam.)

Why publish? Because there's something unique about the poems, Roger said, a generalist voice that isn't found in other recent anthologies, one that reaches across genres and styles and generations and geography with something lively and direct and spoken and emotional, something combining intelligence with heart. Appealing poems. Poems that mean something, that have guts. And poems that do represent a wide range of writers and current poetry practices across the country. So many Ottawans, though, I objected. Yes, but in a pattern that has shifted across a number of different cities over the decades. Right now Ottawa is a hotbed of poetry in Canada—possibly even *the* hotbed. Small enough for a good community, large enough for a real mix of people, it's become home to national and international award winners, more than a dozen reading series, an international writers' festival that runs year-round, a new cross-genre festival (Versefest), several fine poetry publishers, and an incipient poet laureate. As well, "Ottawans" come

from a constantly changing population: we have two universities and a bunch of colleges (all with writing programs), the federal government and public service, the diplomatic and foreign-service crowd, the national Canada Council for the Arts and Public Lending Rights program, and a substantial cluster of non-profit organizations and writers' groups, both local and beyond. It's a good place to start if you want to find terrific Canadian poets of all stripes, and from many parts of the country.

The rest of the publishing story is the usual one of surprises, late nights, almost missed deadlines, disgruntlement and delight, so I won't recount it, but will say that two other people were crucial: Sudbury publisher Laurence Steven of Scrivener press, who took on the book with enthusiasm and proved flexible, cheerful, smart, helpful, and just pushy enough; and Gwen Frankton, my best friend from childhood, now returned from a publishing career in the far north and willing to take time out from her own painting to do the book design, including six original drawings. Once the book appeared, hot from the press with that wonderful fresh ink smell in less than six months, many authors have staged launches or travelled to attend them. I don't know what American poets are like (though I expect the same), but Canadian poets are just plain generous. Friends, as I said, and friends.

GREEN: Already the idea of representativeness has come up a few times, and it's something I'm always concerned about. As you know, *Rattle* is featuring a tribute to Canadian poets this summer. I always try my best to make the tributes reflect what's really going on in any given area, but oftentimes I'm never quite sure myself. We don't solicit poems directly, so what's published ends up being a representative sample of what we liked of what was submitted. I always wonder what we might have missed. Can you say anything about the Canadian poetry scene as a whole? You characterized *Pith & Wry* as "lively and direct and spoken and emotional"—are there certain

literary trends you're aware of that were left out?

And I've been dying to bounce this idea off someone more knowledgeable: During my crash-course in reading Canadian poetry, I seem to notice a stronger dichotomy than I think exists in the States. More Canadian poets seem to embrace the avant-garde; there are a lot of language poets, visual poets, a lot of experimentation. And then it seems, maybe in counterpose, there's another large group of poets who instead return to tradition—formalism and naturalism. Most of the poems I've read seem to clearly fall into one of those two camps. Other than the obvious oversimplification, do you think that's an accurate impression of the Canadian "landscape"?

MCMMASTER: In Canada, "representativeness" is practically holy. Or possibly wholly. Especially in a field like poetry, which purports to be not just politically sensitive, but way ahead of its time. And is, in my opinion. I've personally been part of the opening up of the doors of the League of Canadian Poets to raging and ribald feminism and multigender mind-bending, to wall-shaking rap and dub and performance poets, to wildly wrangling and eventually welcoming First Nations' voices, to regional fires and festive reunions coalescing across age and space and poetics and politics, to tiffs and spleen, to the respected and loved.... Tending to produce altogether not just a poetry publishing environment as wide as our tundra but as changeable as our skies. Canada is rife with poets—they dig in everywhere. How can any one magazine or any one anthology encompass all that? Hence my first reaction to the request to edit what became *Pith & Wry*, namely, aagggghhh!

But yes, I'll try to offer an overview of what's happening, what I've caught, and what I've missed. You offer me a dichotomy. I'll raise you three and identify five main strains in current Canadian poetry. The first is geographical. Thirty million people are not that many spread across one of the largest countries in the world, so yes, there are regional pre-



BOOK FEATURE - PITH & WRY

occupations, regional dialects, regional themes. We have writers in *P&W* from the west coast, through the mountains, the prairies, the forests and urban hubs of Quebec, and Ontario, to the east coast, from the frigid Arctic to the deep south (in Canadian terms, this is Windsor).

An especially intriguing area just really opening up now to southerners is the poetic, millennia-old, oral literature of the Inuit and Innu of the far North. Some of this is now being transcribed and translated into English or French; alongside this are direct contemporary compositions with a northern consciousness as in the *P&W* poem by Iqaluit poet Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory. This is a fascinating area; I'd love to hear more from it.

Beyond geography there are four main strains: modernist/postmodernist writing; peoples' poetry; experimental/new language poetry; and performance poetry. Modernist/postmodernist writers—what you call traditionalists—are still the largest group, starting with such writers as P.K. Page, Elizabeth Brewster, F.R. Scott, and Irving Layton, and moving into the next generation of Margaret Atwood, Don McKay, Dennis Lee, Gwendolyn MacEwan, Pat Lowther, Leonard Cohen, and now, with the spice of a goodly dollop of postmodern irony, into mine, with such writers as Bronwen Wallace, Dave Margoshes, Lorna Crozier, Colin Morton, Heather Spears, and Betsy Struthers.

Current page poetry acknowledges elements of meta-language and experimentation, using the visual techniques of concrete poetry as a constant organizing element, for example, and it's stuffed with surreal imagery and rant, but it remains essentially lyrical, narrative, semantically conventional. This would describe the approach of many of the *Pith & Wry* poets, presented in the intro to the book as "poets and poems that twinge my sense of the strange... cut straight to the pith—while at the same time casting a wry eye of mature understanding on human passions and despairs." Postmodern in its ironic meta-view and tendency to self-mockery, polit-

ical in its deconstruction of "family values" and other outrages and absurdities, this strain of Canadian poetry still centers around human emotions and ethics, and speaks in a direct conversational voice. I'm especially proud that *P&W* includes two early poems by that marvelous modernist-post-modernist Margaret Atwood, both first published in *Branching Out*, the feminist-arts magazine I started in the 1970s. These largely unknown pieces are fascinating for their insight into one of our great poets, and it's typical of her to support both that original radical venture, and this 2011 gathering of community in *Pith & Wry*.

As a side note, a few editors in recent years have been attempting to identify a "new canon" of Canadian poets, an idea I find odd. It's a notable aspect of Canadian poets, in my experience, that they're willing to go anywhere, chase down any idea or approach that works, without tying it to a specific set of ideas, or worrying about who will be upset. (On the other hand, I may just be annoyed because I'm not included in their canonical publications!)

"People's poetry" is the third strain, represented by such forerunners as Dorothy Livesay, Al Purdy, and Tom Wayman, although unidentified as a group until Milton Acorn made a fetish and a politics of this idea. The concept was further fostered by Ted Plantos and others, and is now commemorated by the prestigious national Acorn-Plantos Poetry Prize. People's poetry is intense, direct, spoken, narrative, vernacular, even venal. It's dramatic and verbose rather than tight, lyrical, and oblique. It's definitely non-academic. People's poets address non-literary people with non-artsy jobs about widely shared life experiences and broad human issues in accessible, occasionally even rough or profane, language. This is not a small or eccentric corner of Canadian writing; the first "People's Poetry Prize" was given to Acorn in 1970 by a wide group of his peers, including such luminaries as Layton and Atwood and Eli Mandel, who felt his work had never been properly recognized by such establishment prizes as the Governor

General's Award (which Acorn later received in 1976). In *Pith & Wry*, poems by Ronnie R. Brown, John B. Lee, Mary Dalton, and Marty Gervais exemplify this voice, among others. My own *P&W* selection comes from a book that was a finalist for the Acorn-Plantos poetry prize—it's a style that appeals to my populist and socialist side.

Fourth, as you've noted, there's a hefty contingent of language poets, concrete poets, intermedia poets, web and e-poets, form-twisting poets, gender-bending poets—a lot of wild experimenters in Canada. Possibly this is the result of too many long dark cold nights with a bottle of cheap whiskey and nothing to do but dream up extremes. We like stretching limits. Starting with poets like Daphne Marlatt and Betsy Warland in the '60s and '70s, one of the first limits to be pulled and then snapped was the notion that patriarchal language by its very structures and roots denied the female voice, and by extension, as these poets began to deconstruct language following Derridean logic, denied alternate sexual expression to lesbian, gay, and trans voices. Two fine writers in this mode appear in *Pith & Wry*, Erin Mouré, with a poem cycle written in the '80s that gives a first taste of deconstructionism, liberated sexuality, and Canadian nationalism, while still nodding towards a modernist past with accessible language; and a hot-off-the-press contribution by Kate Eichhorn that shows where these explorations have led in the years since.

In other explorations, concrete poetry by writers like bpNichol and Joe Rosenblatt, both of whom have works in the National Gallery of Canada, led the way in recent decades for an explosion of experimentation with words as visual objects. Collaborations between poets and artists are common, and some poets, like P.K. Page [P.K. Irwin] also *are* artists, an area I haven't even touched. In general, visual poetry and collaborations are not included in *Pith & Wry*, because these really need their own anthology, preferably oversized, to allow for all the visual pyrotechnics.



BOOK FEATURE - PITH & WRYYYY

The other area of innovation, so large and bursting that it needs its to be identified as a separate, fifth strain, is performance poetry, usually known in its current form as spoken word. Canadian performance poetry began in my lifetime (there were many precursors) with the work in the '60s of sound poets like bpNichol and the Four Horsemen, bill bissett, Penn Kemp, Owen Sound, and Resound. The '80s and '90s saw new intermedia forms combining poetry with art, theatre, dance and music, for example, in works by Anne Szumigalski, my own wordmusic (multi-voice) group First Draft (with Colin Morton and Andrew McClure), and Penn Kemp's "sound operas."

At the same time dub poetry by outstanding poets like Lillian Allen, followed by rap—a master Canadian rapper is Buck 65—had transmogrified by the '90s and 2000s into spoken word and slam poetry, for which Canadians are—wait for it—world famous. Ottawa's own Oni the Haitian Sensation, for example, was an originator of Capital Slam and a winner of the Canadian championships alongside slammers like Anthony Bansfield (a.k.a. the nth digri), Shauntay Grant, and John Akpata; another Ottawan, Ian Keteku, became the international slam champion first in the US in 2009 and then in Paris in 2010. My own millennial contribution is recording and performing with Geode Music & Poetry (a.k.a. SugarBeat). There are even real-life music-and-poetry publishers here, Pendas Productions (Penn Kemp again), and Rattling Books (Newfoundland & Labrador; hey! you should connect...). Of course I couldn't wangle really any of this stuff into *Pith & Wry* because it's for the ear not the eye. Some day I hope another editor or producer will pull together a representative—oops, there's that word again—OK, a friendly gathering of mentors and peers into an audio/video/text anthology that celebrates our performance poetry as it should be celebrated. Just thinking about it fills me with excitement—though admittedly thinking about actually *doing* it fills me with exhaustion!

And talking of energy, there are a couple of sub-strains of the Canadian scene that demand a mention. The vital energy and raw directness of First Nations voices began to be heard and published widely here in the '80s—not without struggle and argument, I should add, since the intense political directness of the work struck diffident mainstream ears like a wake-up hammer. I remember Louise Bernice Halfe (Sky Dancer) and Maria Campbell for example, as clarion bells. In recent years many First Nations writers have leapt more into performance

forms like songwriting and theatre and spoken word, as heard for example at the Vancouver Olympics, where Shane Koyczan presented "We Are More" to wide acclaim at the opening ceremonies for the Winter Games—a pretty strong indicator that Canada is bulging with poets, and that we love them!

Finally, I do have to emphasize that what I've said applies to English literature, and not necessarily to the large and powerful writing scene in French across Canada, which punches way above its weight because of its power and enthusi-



Bicycle

Louis Phillips



BOOK FEATURE - PITH & WRy

astic readership. There's a growing movement to integrate the French and English poetry—through translations and bilingual publications, by two poets writing in concert, for example, in recent collections by Buschek Books. As well—and this particularly interests me—there's a minor but recurring stream of interlanguage compositions that move freely between French and English, as indeed many Canadians do in day-to-day speech. A primary text for that stream was “La guerre, yes sir!” by Roch Carrier, published in 1968. This whole area is being increasingly recognized through grants and major translation prizes.

Sorry for such a long answer! As you can see, the poetry bag in Canada is bursting.

GREEN: No need to apologize—a broad question deserves a broad answer. Whether we decide to call it a dichotomy or jump to a heptatomy, I think you might be on a better track just describing it as open-minded. There's a story about Allen Ginsberg being asked by a disappointed fan to comment on a recent Robert Creeley book. Ginsberg hadn't read it, but his response was enthusiastic: “Whatever Bob's doing, I'm *for* it!” The anecdote is intended to lament that we don't all act like Ginsberg, but maybe Canadian poets come closer. Now that you mention it, in the thousands of submissions we read, I can't recall a single disparaging remark from one strain aimed at another. Maybe what I saw as secured encampments are really just neighboring fields, with fertile soil and room to grow.

That kind of diversity leads me into the next question. One of the enjoyable aspects of *Pith & Wry* is the organization—there are six sections, with fascinatingly vague headings: “Entry Points,” “Beware,” “The Storytellers,” “Appetite,” “Pith & Wry,” and “A-New.” It's never obvious why a poem lands where it does, but the placement doesn't feel random, either. The result is a kind of puzzle I found myself playing as I read through the book. Without giving the game away, why did you choose this structure, and

where did you come up with these subtleties?

MCMMASTER: The Sargasso sea? Or, since this is Canada, how about a fly-ridden swamp in the northern wastes, or the ice-jumbled Straits of Fury and Hecla? All to say, from the turgid depths of my undisciplined mind. When I first started shaping a book out of these poems, I wanted titles that weren't simply labels, but that held intimations of their own. That were broad while being exact, like a line of a poem. Trigger phrases to start the reader wondering and wandering before reading even a line.

The first phrase to swim up from the depths, grinning wickedly, was “Pith & Wry.” I think it was called into being by Dave Margoshes' quirky poetry: he has a sideways view of the world which always draws me in, not just because of the ideas and striking language, but because he cuts straight through any puffery or baffle-gab to the inner landscape. So I stuck all the poems that felt particularly skewed or that had a strong element of irony, anger, or humor into that basket.

Other titles surfaced as easily—“The Storytellers” for narratives, “Entry Points” for the first section, “A-New” for emerging poets. “Beware” was prompted by Lorna Crozier's intense poems about angels and her mother's disintegration. “Appetite” came from Monty Reid's minimalist love series, which twists the metaphors of desire around themselves—and so much of poetry is about desire. Interestingly, I almost immediately switched Dave to the first category, “Entry Points”—as a pointer to that kind of poetry throughout the book, which in turn highlights the fact that all the entries share characteristics with poems in other sections. This explains why you find no clear boundaries between sections, though many echoes. All the poems in *Pith & Wry* incorporate clear or buried stories, all open from a precise point, whether needle-sharp image or word puzzle, all invite the reader to leap into unexpected realms. And all assert that soaring or delving are dangerous, because we're all propelled by the same primal

hungers that make these poems so energetic, whether we acknowledge them or not. When it came to deciding what poem to put in what section, I relied as always on my inner swamp, switching them here and there till the whole had the feel of a piece of music, with themes and repetitions and an overall arc.

The only phrase that caused serious discussion was the anthology's title, *Pith & Wry*, of which one author was said: “Everyone will read this as ‘Piss and Rye!’” She was right, of course, but somehow that just made me laugh—a disrespectful response, I admit. Others liked it, for the resonances, perhaps, but also in some cases exactly for that same rather childish pun, which no doubt says something about poets—and me. Still, it's not an obvious title: *Pith & Wry* is opaque—what the heck does it mean? And it combines a noun with an adjective, which is not the grammar I learned in grade five. But the phrase began to gain more and more strength for me, till I realized that it truly does catch the direct, gutsy, emotional but ironic sensibility that informs all these writers—and that is pervasive throughout contemporary Canadian poetry. As you said at the beginning of this interview, yes, this is a book of my personal favorite poets, peers, and mentors, but they represent a central and widely shared range of vision that you can find across our land—and maybe, in the end, piss and rye expresses it almost as well.

By the way, I just heard from the publisher that the anthology has sold half its run already, in just four months, and is still going strong. Not bad for a vagrant thought, that led to a bit of talk between friends...

GREEN: Not bad at all! Thanks for taking the time to talk about it.

NOTES:

ⁱ Szumigalski, Anna. *Dogstones* (Fifth House, 1986).

ⁱⁱ www.sugarmule.com/33flash2.htm

ⁱⁱⁱ www.sugarmule.com/smbooks.htm



from PITH & WRY
Canadian Poetry

Laakkuluk Willamson Bathory

HOW AKUTAQ CAME TO BE

She came to be like a knot on a limb
a beautiful swirl, a snarl, a song
a fistful of passion on a branch reaching for sunlight.

It begins like thunder rumbling in the distance.
It is powerful as ice calving from glaciers.
Incessant as two weeks of hard rain.
What was once your sweet, swollen body
has become a single large muscle uncurling in slow fast motion.
Giving birth to a child is
the visceral smell of animals, earth, humans
the breath of life crossing death crossing life
the sound of a woman's body shape-shifting
the searing taste of incandescent pain
the vision of the minute, the present and everything
the feel of infinity, forever and nothing.

Here and now, all the cycles you have ever noticed
the moon, the tides, night and day
and even the hourly radio news
have funnelled into waves

deep ins

deep outs

qummut...ammut

deep gatherings

and deep flushing.

Every hand that touches you

sends streaks of confidence to your pounding heart.

Every look into your eyes

trickles warmth into your belly like melt water beneath spring ice.

The waves build onto themselves

turn into walls that you climb

boulders you scale

cliff faces you master.

Your body begins to reject any distractions from that

single goal

of opening and releasing.

Mind and body become separate beings

and your mind is

weak

compared to your body.

Timiga tassa! Stop! Your mind cries out. Let me rest!

Taamaatoqanngilaq isuma! No! Your body responds. We must press on!

[...]



from PITH & WRY
Canadian Poetry

[How Akutaq Came to Be, 2]

Your mind can't take it anymore and leaves.
It wanders through specks of dust floating in the air
streams into cupboards, pulls out photos from long ago memory
and tries to pour cool, soothing ether into your toiling muscles.
Your body is relentless, taking
deep ins
 deep outs
 qummut...ammut
deep gatherings
 and deep flushing.
It expels excess burdens
 out with the food
 out with the fluid.
Out! Out! We don't need these anymore!
This child must have the world for itself.
This child must move down

down
down.

Bones creak open to make room
flesh begins to split and
all...breath...now...owned by...muscle...alone...
body and mind snap back together.
Every particle of existence pours into the PUSH
Every cell in the body sucks new breath for the
PUSH

AND PUSH
AND PUSH

And then
 that completely unbelievable surreal thing happens
 that mundane ordinary down-to-earth thing happens
 that happens every second of every day around the world.

One body brings forth another body.
One person has become two people.
Two people in love have become three people full of love.
Hands grab this other-worldly blue creature
and lay HER! on my chest

 and we rub her and rub her and rub her.
She is still blue and hasn't said a thing yet.
She isn't breathing.
She isn't breathing.

Hands grab my baby and take her away
 they slap her, slide tubes down her nose and mouth.
 I can't see her.

My love and my friend both hold me and look me straight in the eyes.
3 more seconds...10 more seconds...

[...]



from PITH & WRY
Canadian Poetry

[*How Akutaq Came to Be*, 3]

Still nothing.
Time has stopped.
I need to hear my baby...
CRY! AND SHE DOES.
My life is replete.
I am lying in a pool of blood, I am torn and bruised
and we have never been happier.

So how did Akutaq come to be?
She came to be like a knot on a limb.
A beautiful swirl, a snarl, a song.
A fistful of passion unfurling on a branch reaching into sun.



Prison
Louis Phillips

*from PITH & WRY**Canadian Poetry**John B. Lee***THE SUMMER MY SON
PAINTED THE HOUSE**

The summer
I insisted that my unemployed son
paint the house
he rattled up the ladder
arriving at all the windows at once
his swung pail clangouring
like anger in an orchard
and all that white paint tainted the panes
splashed the sill and
dashed at the brick
as he came swathing toward the sashes
like ledge pigeons
like rock gulls, like guano
at the cenotaph
like bird lime
on the hero's stony forehead in the park
oh, he was dutiful enough
to do it
but his disgruntlement at being forced
wept from his every pore like milk
and he was furious
his bristled arms whisked like dog wag, like sea splash
and when he came to me
wanting recompense
his white hands still wet

his body half-bleached
as if he were slowly but surely
becoming Master Blank
or as if he were an old soul becoming 'the boy'
face first...
and looking much like
the son in the photograph album
the son on my desk dipped to the chin
in lilies
the one I loved
who isn't so angry
who when I sell this house some day
as one might sell
the brick of swans
the glaze of some fog-drowsy
window cleaner
smearing the glass with soap
in gone-dry splotches
that suffer the yard to blur
I also sell off little
tints of wrath—oh buyer
think of yourself as
Vincent's brother Theo
this mason's canvas as a living record
these windows
descended from angels
whose shoulders rubbed off a chalky beatitude
flying in, flying out
and my son was simply
tracing their journey
their sojourn lingering in frost



from PITH & WRY
Canadian Poetry

Lorna Crozier

FINALLY

The word Love means someone takes you
in your old clothes, your face too bare, too open,
when someone fastens the buttons on your coat
as if you've fallen back through sixty years to be
a child again, when someone takes you onto the path
holding you by the arm, your feet not knowing what
they used to know, your feet in rubber boots stumbling,
blind to roots and stones, when someone takes you
to the ocean, the water also in the air raining down
its saltless weeping, the word Love means someone
takes you to the rocks, rain too heavy for the gulls
to fly, three bobbing like windless boats, all sails
and heartbeat, Love leaves you there, no words
for it now, you and the gulls and the ocean
that moves as far away from you as it can go.

Jeanette Lynes

**THINKING OF YOU DURING SECURITY
SCREENING AT CALGARY AIRPORT**

My bra sets off the alarm—
O shocking bosom!
Love, you'd laugh at the serious
Official wandng my chest,
you know, my criminal holder,
limp and harmless
as an old basset hound,
a sports bra, with metal grommets,
a cross-tab for hanging
a pager, I suppose,
though I'd hardly know—
the only jogging I've done
is to your gate.

I'm not secure—
when I arrive
unhook me,
toss the old dog
high, across the room.



EYE CONTACT



EYE CONTACT:

A LOOK AT VISUAL POETRY WITH DAN WABER

#4: Ward Tietz

Note: All electronic submissions of visual poetry are automatically considered for Dan Waber's biannual "Eye Contact" column. If you're interested in having your work featured, follow the regular guidelines at: www.rattle.com/submissions.htm

Poetry is about text. But it isn't only about that single layer of text. It's about that single layer of text as it exists in relation to all other text (its context). And, because we are meaning-making machines, it is also about what isn't said (its subtext). Poetry is in the stitch that threads together the text, the context, and the subtext.

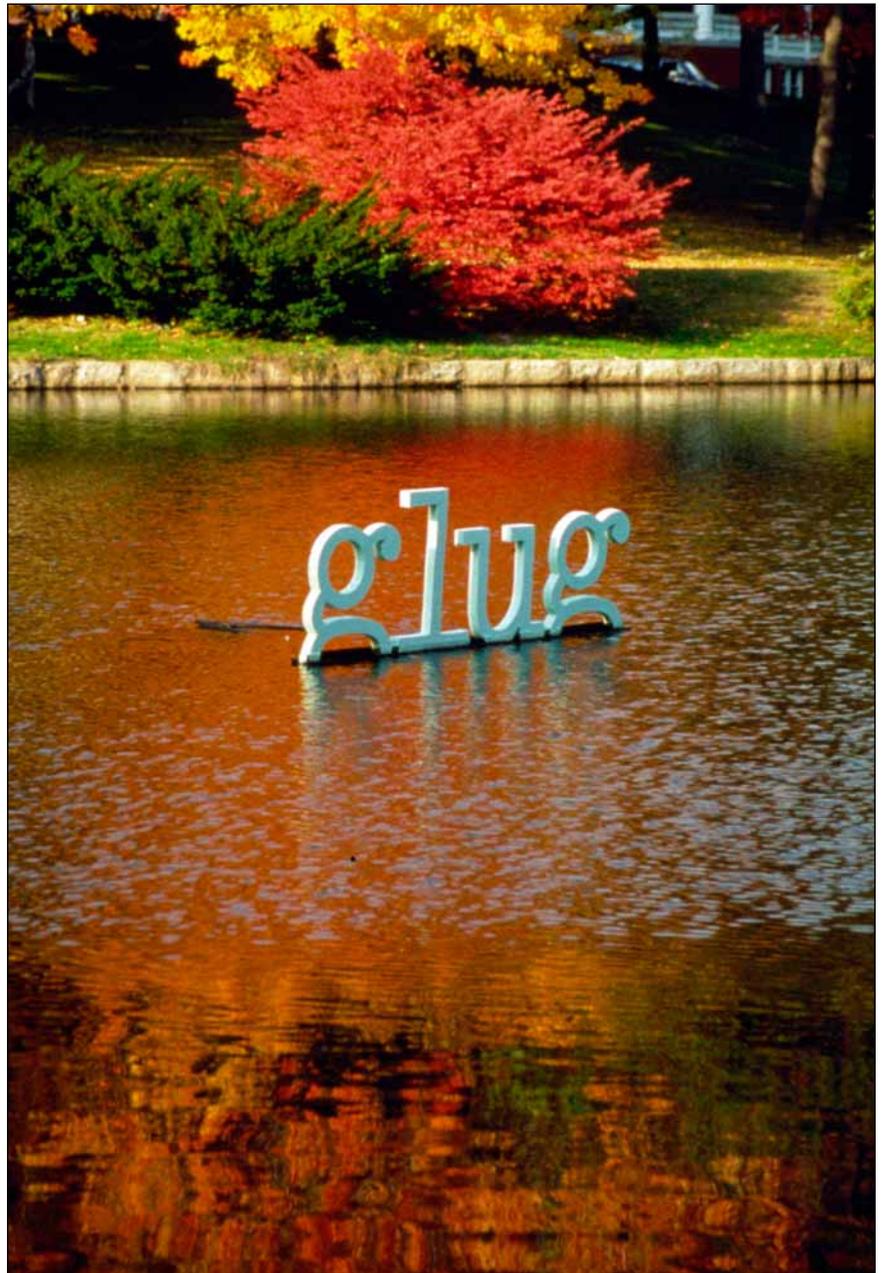
I am drawn to the minimal when I want to talk about something specific, or to show something discrete, or to illustrate a small point with larger implications. Many (but certainly not all) visual poetries tend towards the minimal, as well. I think this has to do with the nature of how a visual poem is read.

Traditionally read prose text is strictly linear, and the block of text that is the prose page is not intended to be visually apprehended as a whole—in fact, the stated goal of many typographers and book designers is to make the text disappear.

Traditionally read poetry is aware of its visual aspect, and does concern itself in some small ways with the way it looks when first seen, but it is still a linear event. In much contemporary lyric free verse poetry the visual aspect may be serving no other function than to differentiate the text from flash fiction.

Traditionally viewed visual art is a two-step process. Primarily there is the initial taking in of the whole then, secondarily, the eyes and the mind find a visual flow through the piece.

Visual poetry at its best occupies that sweet-spot between the visual and the lexical where the elements are inextricable. Most visual art is intended to be seen first as a whole; most visual poetry



Glug
Ward Tietz



EYE CONTACT

is, as well. Most poetry is intended to be read as text; most of the visual poetry I enjoy is, as well.

These two pieces by Ward Tietz appear to be simple sculptures, but they are not simple at all. Read them as text and they are simple. One word, three words; it doesn't get much simpler than that. But read them as poetry, considering their subtext and their context, and they cease to be simple.

What does "glug" mean here? It is an onomatopoeic word we associate with a sudden volume of air rising up through water, as from an exhalation or a last gasp. Why might we be seeing a "glug" above a body of water? Something must have gone under. Anyone recognize the font? American Typewriter.

The second piece is wound tightly, too. It is titled "Save Monkey" though

the piece itself considers "A" to be pivotal. We are balanced, but precariously, in view of a range of results of technological ingenuity. The yellow and the sans serif font of "save" calls to mind the legendary marketing expression "buy now and save." The serif letters of "monkey" are barely holding their meaning together as they reach out past the edge of (of course) a ladder in their effort to find balance. And I keep coming back to that "A" as the crux, as the fulcrum for the lever. It makes me consider the large and small differences between "monkey," "a monkey," "the monkey," "this monkey," and "that monkey," which is to say the large and small differences between all us monkeys.



Poetic artist WARD TIETZ works in a variety of media and forms from works on paper to word and letter sculptural installations in wood, wax, concrete and steel. He is presently developing *Three Recipes*, a three-dimensional landscape writing, for a lake in Cameron Station, Alexandria, Virginia for 2012. His book *Hg—The Liquid* is forthcoming from 1913 Press. Views from earlier work are at www.wordimage.net

DAN WABER is a visual poet and multimedia artist living in Kingston, PA. For more, please visit his website: www.logolia.com



Save Monkey

Ward Tietz



PIXEL POETRY: A MERITOCRACY

by
Colin Ward

THE ONLY THINGS WORSE THAN GENERALS
ARE GENERALITIES.

In serving the online literary community as critic, columnist, moderator, administrator, contest facilitator, technician, consultant, designer, and programmer for the last quarter century, I've been struck by the differences between its communities and products and those of the offline or "real" world.

When internauts speak of "online" poetry they really mean "online workshopppers" poetry, not what is found on blogs, vanity sites and personal webzines. For example, the loveable, irrepressible Bill Knott may be the Walt Whitman of our time, promoting, selling and giving away his work. Because he does much of this on the internet, offliners might consider him an online poet. No one who has been plugged in for more than a decade would agree. Similarly, every word that Shakespeare ever wrote can be found on various sites but he's hardly an "internet poet." Magazines archiving older issues online don't make for "online poetry" in any but the most literal sense. Conversely, if Usenet star poet Robert J. Maughan scratched some verse onto birch bark 200 miles from the nearest computer and published it in *The New Yorker* it would still be an online poem. What distinguishes pixel from page poetry isn't where it is written, revised, reviewed or published but whether or not the poet's technical and critical skills reflect time spent in an online workshop.

At the risk of oversimplification, page poetry is about poets, pixel poetry is about poems. To an offliner, a poem may be a poet's greeting or business card, a

piece in a self-portrait jigsaw puzzle or an invitation to psychoanalysis. "Pragmatic" and "professional" describe what we find in poetry books and magazines. The careerist track of aspiring academics is the most salient example. In this publish-or-perish environment, people more interested in and better suited to teaching poetry than writing it are driven to use up print publishing resources. This impetus, along with other commercial motivations, is unique to the print world. One obvious ramification is that the once common practice of publishing poems anonymously or pseudonymously is unthinkable to today's print poets.

In contrast, the pixel poet is both a "purist" and an "amateur" who, for better or worse, views each poem as a isolated specimen. Unless part of a series, each poem will serve as its own context. As for the author's role in this exploratory surgery, well, the biologist rarely speculates about the Creator. Think New Criticism, minus the crazy parts.

When offliners think of workshops they imagine face-to-face (F2F) settings, either writers groups or MFA-style peer gatherings. Academic workshopppers tend to share similarities including occupation (student?), esthetic, education, locale and age. In either model the circumstances can make objectivity and candor difficult. Critics need distance, including physical space. The same verse submitted to an online critical forum may be examined by readers from all continents, ages, occupations, styles and knowledge levels. If posted to an expert venue a poem might attract the attention of some of the greatest critiquers alive: Peter John Ross, James Wilks, Rachel Lindley, Stephen

Bunch, the Roberts (Schlechter, Mackenzie and Evans), Richard Epstein, Hannah Craig or John Boddie, to name only a few. There is, quite literally, a world of difference between F2F and online workshops. This diversity and sophistication avoids the homogeneity that F2F workshops can spawn. It also explains why the word "peer" is less frequently used to describe online workshops.

What traits do online workshopppers have in common? The pixel poet must have an abiding interest in improving, obviously, but also in the elements, rather than just the products, of the craft. This is not the place for those who neither know nor care to know that "Prufrock" is metrical. This is not the place for "substance over form" advocates blurring profound prose with linebreaks. This is not the place for, as Leonard Cohen would say, "other forms of boredom advertised as poetry." This is a meritocracy of poems, and no one is better than their current effort. If Shakespeare himself posted a clunker to one of the expert-only venues he might be confronted with comments like:

"You use words like a magpie uses wedding rings."

—Gerard Ian Lewis

"Please tell me there were no dice involved in choosing your words."

—Manny Delsanto

As you can imagine, the online workshop breeds humility and respect for the art form.

The rules are simple: Critique as much and as thoroughly as you can and thank those who grace you with their thoughts. Newcomers to internet workshopping are urged to start on one of the "friendlies." Of these, let me recommend:

The Wild Poetry Forum
www.wildpoetryforum.com

The Waters
www.thewaters35527.yuku.com



OPINION

The Critical Poet
www.criticalpoet.com

Desert Moon Review
www.thedesertmoonreview.com

In general, the poetry and critique on these venues is about what you'd expect from novice forums but one can, at the very least, use this introductory period to read guidelines and develop the mechanics of threading, posting and creating links and attributes. Through many of these sites aspiring acolytes can participate in the InterBoard Poetry Contest (IPBC).ⁱ

Serious students are encouraged to lurk and learn on the expert venues for a few months until they are ready to participate:

Eratosphere
www.ablemuse.com/erato

Gazebo
www.thealsopreview.com

Poetry Free-For-All
www.everypoet.org/pffa

Poets.org Forum
www.poets.org/forum

N.B.: Both of the latter accept novice members but PFFA's idea of a "novice" translates to what offliners would consider "experienced." PFFA and Poets.org also host two of the three best online learning resources:

PFFA's Blurbs of Wisdom
<http://www.everypoet.org/pffa/forumdisplay.php?f=34>

Poets.org's main site
www.poets.org

Glossary of Poetic Terms from Bob's Byway
www.poeticbyway.com/glossary.html

Thus, the pixel poetry milieu is, in fact, two supercommunities: serious and friendly. These can usually be differentiated by the presence or absence of active technical and theoretical fora. Both meta-groups produce their share of prominent figures and lasting relationships. Both site

types welcome "board-hoppers"; many people are members of all four serious venues.

The first difference that might strike newcomers to e-poetry is the gender balance. From workshopers to webzine editors and contributors, women are better represented in cyberspace than in print. Online, males significantly outnumber females only in the blogosphere, a milieu that most webziners and pixel poets assiduously avoid.

CONTENT IS CARGO, VERSE IS VESSEL.

Pixel and page criticism and poetry occupy opposite ends of the form-versus-substance teeter-totter. No matter how profound the prose, onliners are far less likely to accept it as poetry. Interpretation, which is central to academic criticism, is the least significant aspect of serious online workshop critique.

Almost nothing is known about the

author of our first example. D.P. Kristalo posted primarily to Poets.org and Gazebo in 2007. Even DPK's gender is unknown, but in discussing the poet most use feminine pronouns. Because the internet serves as an outlet for those in need of anonymity, onliners consider it bad form to speculate about identities. As we'll see, many of the best internet poets are frustratingly shy about their work. To my knowledge, not one of the poems reprinted here was ever submitted over the transom.

GOOD ACTORS PAUSE FOR BREATH. GREAT ACTORS PAUSE FOR THOUGHT.

"Beans" (*Fig. 1*) is the archetypal online poem: superbly crafted, original and fascinating from a technical, intellectual and emotional perspective. The fact that it is a curgina (i.e. verse with free verse linebreaks, like the bacchic monometer of "We Real Cool" by Gwendolyn Brooks) reflects the higher mix of

D.P. Kristalo

BEANS

September came like winter's
ailing child but
left us
viewing Valparaiso's pride. Your face was
always saddest when you smiled. You smiled as every
doctored moment lied. You lie with
orphans' parents, long
reviled.

As close as coppers, yellow beans still
line Mapocho's banks. It
leads them to the sea;
entwined on rocks and saplings, each
new vine recalls that
dawn in 1973 when
every choking, bastard weed grew wild.

Fig. 1



OPINION

metered work found online. Its tautness reflects the online workshop's discipline. The unusual subject matter and treatment reflects the pixel poet's reader-orientation. A teacher could spend days describing the merits of this acrostic: the terminal diaeresis in stanza 1, the "aw" and "I" sounds slowing down the read for the denouement, the triple entendre of "coppers," the dramatic ambivalence and ambiguity of "Valparaiso" (birthplace of both the coup and its principle victim), the cautious euphemisms that begin most of the lines (and explain the erratic linebreaks), etc.

Ask who the best contemporary print poet is and you're bound to get a wide variety of responses: Walcott, Heaney, Laux, Hill, Cohen, etc. Ask about the best online poet and you'll get one

answer: the late Margaret A. Griffiths, aka "Maz" or "Grasshopper." In a 2005 pollⁱⁱ members of the expert community declared Maz the poet they'd most want to see in an anthology. This was five months before her signature masterpiece (*Fig. 2*) was written and five years before it was published (posthumously).

When Margaret died suddenly in 2008 a throng of admirers worldwide began scouring archives and hard drives, collecting hundreds of her poems. These were recently released by Arrowhead Press in a volume called *Grasshopper: The Poetry of M A Griffiths*.ⁱⁱⁱ This book is a must-own for any serious student of the craft.

Of course, most pixel poets aren't as introverted as Maz and DPK. Nevertheless, the point is made that as a

group, unlike Bill Knott, pixel poets are not great self-promoters.

Online poetry has a longer history than many imagine. For fifteen years before the web arrived in the mid-1990s the only game in town was the rec.arts.poems newsgroup on Usenet (and its echo chamber, alt.arts.poetry.comments). This was the greatest single meeting of poetry authorities in history. Nevertheless, it was a relatively unknown contributor, Marco Morales, who wrote this classic "killer and filler" poem:

HOOKERS

Missing you again,
I embrace shallow graves.
Pale faces, doughlike breasts
help me forget.

The poem is about "me missing you" and, sure enough, those are the only words that have vowel sounds absent from that killer second line. Don't let the L1 acephaly or L4 trochaic inversion fool you; "Hookers" is blank verse: iambic trimeter, ending in a dimeter. The "three tris per dime" ratio gives the form its name: a carnivalia.

Usenet was the source not only of the online workshop ethos but of many invaluable truisms as well, including:

TIGGER'S TIP #14:

"Every modern poem must contain at least one em dash abuse."

MCNEILLEY'S 4TH DICTUM:

"Cut off the last line! This will make your poem better! (If this doesn't work, keep cutting off the last line.)"

THE 1ST LAW:

"Never say anything in a poem that you wouldn't say in a bar."

THE 2ND LAW:

"If you can't be profound be vague."

THE 10TH LAW:

"Don't emote. Evoke."

THE 12TH LAW:

"Try to be understood too quickly."

Margaret A. Griffiths

STUDYING SAVONAROLA, HE CONSIDERS HIS LOVER AS KINDLING

With your amber eyes, yellow and red
of you, sun-sign heart like a blood orange
suspended in a porcelain cage, say you burn

in a courtyard and your ichor drips like honey
on the firewood, on the branches bound in fascos,
flesh fumed in the air, dark as molasses,

but what you are hovers as mist, as the spirit
of water is invisible until steam makes the sky
waver. Say you die, scorched into ashes, say

you pass from here to there, with your marigold
eyes, the garden darker for lack of one golden flower,
would bees mourn, would crickets keen, drawing long

blue chords on their thighs like cellists?
Say you disperse like petals on the wind,
the bright stem of you still a living stroke

in memory, still green, still spring, still the tint
and the tang of you in my throat, unconsumed.

Fig. 2

OPINION

EGOLESS MAXIM:

"If you don't think your poetry is competing against the works of others you're probably right."

Is pixel poetry superior to what is produced elsewhere? Consider what these poems go through. First, they are written with a critical audience in mind. As we saw with "Savonarola," a first draft posted to a serious online forum may well be as good as anything found in print. Second, they run a gauntlet of some of the planet's best critics. Knee-jerk revisions are discouraged. Lastly, they are produced by people who have spent more time learning the difference between diæresis and diarræa than fretting about how many times certain poets cheated on their spouses. Given all of this, shouldn't we expect them to be better? Not surprisingly, pixel poets have won just about every contest and prize

that has blind judging. The Nemerov is practically owned by Eratosphereans. Editors recognize pixel poets' names and report that their acceptance rates are much higher than those of others.

Where do pixel poets publish? Almost anywhere, but favorite haunts include *Rattle*, *Raintown Review*, *Measure*, *The Pedestal*, *The Dark Horse*, *The Hudson Review*, *Lucid Rhythms*, *thehypertexts.com*, *14 by 14*, *Shit Creek Review*, *The Flea*, and *Autumn Sky Poetry*. In short, pixel poets tend to seek editors whose understanding of the craft and technology matches their own.

There is a subtle difference between many webzine editors and their print counterparts: the latter want first, the former want best. To wit, if we look at the major literary print concerns, as listed in Jeffery Bahr's "Approximate Print Journal Ranking,"^{iv} every single one demands first publication rights. As you

may know, *Poetry* magazine was neither the first nor the second to publish "Prufrock." Thus, T.S. Eliot's masterpiece couldn't be submitted to a print venue today. Needless to say, most webziners would do cartwheels before republishing it.

The lack of financial motivation creates an interesting paradox: with no sellers or market it becomes a sellers' market. Let's look at this from an editor-in-chief's point of view. Remember that cartoon where one vulture turns to another and says: "To hell with this waiting. I'm gonna go kill something!"? Many proactive editors are establishing a personal presence in online critical fora. Want to publish a book that may cover your costs in pre-orders? Consider one of the higher profile pixel poets. Seeking a stunning poem to headline your 'zine? Ask one of the regular online workshop critics for a recommendation.



Airplane

Louis Phillips



OPINION

Now let's view the poems-not-poets, best-not-first emphasis from a pixel poet's perspective. In 2006 a young, unknown writer, Erin Hopson, posted a poem to Gazebo. Normally reserved critics raved about it, one gushing: "This is award-winning writing. Change nothing." Four years later, during which time the author completed a college degree, the poem still languished in the author's drawer. Critics have long memories, though. And hard drives. In 2010, during a conversation with *thehypertext.com* editor Mike Burch, that critic presented a copy of that poem for consideration. Not surprisingly, Mr. Burch freaked. One womanhunt later, the poet, who thought it a prank at first, was contacted. In short order this sensuous ekphrastic brilliancy, based on the Max Färberböck 1999 film, *Aimee and Jaguar*, was published. (Fig. 3)

Candid, informed criticism isn't for everyone. The vast majority of poets are unfamiliar with Scavella's mantra (i.e. "I'm not as good as I think I am") and have no interest in improving their work through such scrutiny. That, then, is the conundrum:

Critique can boast
when pride has ceased:
who needs it most
will seek it least.

NOTES:

ⁱ www.ibpc.webdelso.com

ⁱⁱ www.firesides.ca/bestpoets.htm

ⁱⁱⁱ www.arrowheadpress.co.uk/books/grasshopper.html

^{iv} www.jefferybahr.com/Publications/PubRankings.asp



COLIN WARD was born in 1954 in Brampton, Ontario and, after much wandering, has resided in Winnipeg, Manitoba, for the last thirty years. His work has appeared online in venues ranging from *Beside the White Chickens* to *Autumn Sky Poetry* and has been anthologized in David W. Mitchell's *Talus and Scree*. Colin says, "If you've heard of me you're reading too much poetry."

Erin Hopson

TO SUSTAIN A LOSS WITHOUT SINKING IT: HOW AIMEE REMEMBERS JAGUAR

for Felice Schragenheim & Lilly Wust

I. Sepia

photographs of women whose lips rejected
the stretched curve of smiles, instead waited
plump and teasing. It was better if water clung
to pinned curls, trickled and pooled in gullies.
Cattails should fringe the water's edge.

II. Afternoon

teas that smell of fruit and spice, when brewing
produce more steam than common kinds. See
how stunning an iris in a chipped vase looks.
Add lemon scones and clink of cups held by hands
whose touch caused fires just that morning.

III. Sheets

sink into the spaces between knees, brush bottoms
of feet. The softest parts pursue something equal
to spoon, fingers trace patterns over smooth
and slick terrain. How pliable, the chasm between lovers
where welcome linen soothes the burn.

IV. Dancing

with head rested on satin covered shoulder
the smell of war and sweat is more palatable.
Dizzying twirl and liquor makes the laughter
of fleeing friends less harsh. This was the only place
where women could whisper their true names.

V. On Outings

there would have been sadness. One used to carry
the blanket and one the wicker basket. With only this set,
comparing the size of footprints is less important.
Beyond the cattails, ash and soot cling to the pond,
but comfort is in the scent of spice and fruits and smoke.

Fig. 3



GRASSHOPPER: THE POETRY OF M.A. GRIFFITHS

Review by
Maryann Corbett

The first big thing to get out of the way is this: Yes, Margaret Griffiths published three of my poems in her journal *Worm*. They were early ones, and the encouragement was important to me. But by the time I began to be a “web-active poet” as the term now goes, her own online activity was slowing, and I met her on poetry boards rarely. My dealings with her were businesslike. My involvement with the publication of her poems was limited to a few e-mails about solicitors, next of kin, and copyright ownership. I claim the ability to review this book dispassionately.

The poets who were her long-time online correspondents called her Maz, and on many online forums her user name was “grasshopper,” which explains the book’s title. And this is the second big thing to understand about Margaret Griffiths: that her online work with other poets established the stellar reputation of her poems. The rarefied world of reviewing might prefer to ignore the world of poetry boards, but as places where poets talk with one another, they have significant influence. Although Maz edited an online poetry journal, she rarely submitted for publication. Yet because of her online activity, the force of her work was widely acknowledged, and her contributions to poetry forums both as a poet and as a critic were valued. Her work was so little published in traditional venues—and so esteemed, by so many poets—that, when she died suddenly in 2009, people on several continents realized that only an intensive effort to recover the poems would prevent them from disappearing. *Grasshopper* is the fruit of those people’s hard work. For accounts of their process, take a look at

issue 13 of *The Shit Creek Review*.ⁱ

If Maz had been interested in organizing her work into collections, the poems in this book would probably have come out in three or four of the usual slim volumes. Perhaps she would have grouped the dark, cynical poems on current events with the poems about the chronic stomach ailment that (as her friends suspect) killed her. Or would the political poems go with the brilliantly detailed historical fictions? Or with the magical, myth-derived fantasias? Or the poems that converse with literature in the canon? Perhaps the poems that address the foibles of the online poetry world would have been dropped as bagatelles not worthy of preservation. That would have been a shame; all the wild variety here tells us what an interesting person Maz was, how inventive, how persistently curious about all sorts of subjects.

But how she would have organized the poems we simply don’t know. *Grasshopper* preserves everything that was found, in a attractive binding and with a preface and introduction by Alan Wickes.ⁱⁱ This is more than three hundred fifty pages of poetry, in alphabetical order by poem title. That scheme is probably most helpful to the poets who worked with her, who tended to remember specific poems (often saving copies of them), and who are already an eager audience for the book. Still, it neglects many matters that they, and the rest of us, might like to know. How are the poems related chronologically? Which ones did Maz see as being in relationship to one another? How did she develop as a poet, from the time she began posting work in 2001? Were the metrical and free-verse poems always

Grasshopper



The Poetry of
M A Griffiths

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mixed? I can’t help hoping for a second edition that might have such aids as a chronology and an index of first lines. I could also hope for less haste and more attention in the copyediting. But what we have now is the poems, and only the poems, and they deserve the full accounting that will let a wider audience know what they’re like.

A good number are metrical; many of those use full end rhyme. A few use it ironically (“On Philip Larkin” and “Christopher Robin Muses on Religion”) and a few in the spirit of parody of new-poet-faux-antique style (“Casting Pearls”). There are many sonnets, carefully and correctly and variously formed. Quite a few employ tight form and specific timing to spring a killer ending, often including some X-rated element (“The Other Woman”) or to pierce some social armor, in the manner of R. S. Gwynn or Wendy Cope (“Naming of Parties”).

Many, though, are completely straight. “Opening a Jar of Dead Sea Mud” is one of the best examples, and it



REVIEW

earned praise from Richard Wilburⁱⁱⁱ, probably the foremost American practitioner of form. It feels artless and candid in spite of its strictures. Where the sonnets fall short for me, they do so by being too “canned,” too much on the pattern of the historical anecdote packaged in sonnet shape (“Livia’s Eagle” and “Costanza Carved”). This is a pattern I mistrust as superficial, even while I grant that nothing here is ever less than technically fine. There is no sense in these poems that traditional forms, used in contemporary ways, are anything but perfectly current. I suspect Maz’s internal template for such poems is Larkin: cynical, forthright, and dark.

But besides formal poems, the book also contains every other sort: loose meter, free verse, prose poetry. Or at least it contains every other sort of poetry that uses the ordinary coherence of language to do what poems do. There is no crypticism, no Language poetry. In fact, “Manifesto” makes ironically clear her dim view of cryptic poetry. These are accessible poems, but not at all in the bland, plainspoken, real-life-only way one might associate with Ted Kooser’s *American Life in Poetry*. They’re both clear and imagination-drenched. They believe in vibrant detail and arresting word choice. Take as an example the opening of “The Alchemist’s Omelette”—

If he traces three more arcs, he will
make a cat—
not a common striped creature
like Arnolfini’s
ginger tom—but an incandescent beast

with onyx eyes. Nim pauses, his
horn-nib suspended
over the page, then inscribes two arcs
at the propert declension. The third
curve tries

to draw itself...

The poem piles detail on detail, but what it draws us toward is the sharpness of Idea:

...Once you are, he whispers,

Margaret A. Griffiths

GUT REACTION

Red in the bowl again, bright shocking spots,
beads strung with spittle, ruby mixed with jet.
Say it’s tomato, peppers—there are lots
of explanations for those blobs. Don’t sweat.
Just wipe your mouth and fill a steady glass.
The cold tap foams. The water chills your tongue
and shocks your teeth. Grip this new day. Hold fast.
Remember how you felt once, fit and young
before this aged you, greyed your face and bowed
you down, an acolyte of pain, to retch
and spew. For now, no grumbling is allowed.
Stiff upper lip. Don’t wimp or whinge. Don’t kvetch.
Wait till the angels lift you up, then yell,
“Please drop my bloody stomach off in hell.”

Fig. 4

you will die. Time has stronger magic
than mine.
Without the last stroke, you have
Forever.

Other poems on this magic-making pattern are “The Civet Instructs Her Kits,” “The Mushroom Effect,” and “Shedding a Little Light on Light.”

What simplicity there is in these poems is often an adopted simplicity, a voice put on for its desired effect, a character. “Fer Blossom” puts on a homespun, nonstandard, rural British dialect. “Five fingers” is a child’s prayer. “Snakehead” is written in American Outlaw, “Death Abroad” in short-sentence phonecallese. Maz created innumerable characters, and I suspect this contributed much to her popularity on poetry boards. No fellow poet ever said, as one often comes to say of longtime po-board colleagues, “Oh no, not another poem about [this or that personal obsession]!” She wrote through the minds and mouths of so many other people that one can’t be sure of knowing the real Maz through the poems at all. (The critiques are another matter, but they are not in this book.) The often-used reviewer’s

tactic of judging the poet to be a bad person because of some stance in the poems would be risky here.

Yet the adopted voices feel authentic. Rarely, a persona feels forced or off: a prose poem in the voice of a girl who has undergone forced female genital cutting strikes me as issue-driven. It’s the sort of poem I back away from writing, feeling that it’s exploitative of other people’s suffering. (Would it have been included in a Maz-compiled book? We can’t say.) But the character of the oppressed girl or woman appears over and over, and the abiding need of that character to mask emotion is a recurring ache that seems to reflect Maz’s real thinking: “The Concubine’s Charm,” “Curves,” “Spanish Fleas,” and the prose poem “Before,” about an unwanted pregnancy. Deep resistance to conventional religion is another constant. So are illness and death and the love of animals, sometimes all at once, as in “Listening to the Dog,” sometimes separately, as in “Gut Reaction.” (Fig. 4)

The plain, colloquial, undazzling poems are among the ones I find most moving. “Party Piece” is one; it recites conversation at a New Year’s Eve party,



REVIEW

using its ordinary aimlessness to show how moments almost become meaningful but can't be seized, so that "our tears were lost in the opening year." Others, like "Holes in the News" turn their very plainness surreal:

They put me in a hole and left me there. You know the hole I mean. You scour it out each day until your armpits leak and blood smears plum across your nose. When I try to sleep, they megaphone me, pelt me with pellets of news. You know the news I mean.

The variety here, the huge inventiveness, the range from the staid to the fantastic, is a frustration only to the reviewer. The reviewer keeps looking for patterns in order to create the individual books that Maz never did, but to the reader, what looks like disorder will pose no problem. The reader, after all, would probably have marked those shorter books, noting his or her own favorites, returning to them with pleasure and without regard for the imposed scheme. That's generally how we read and return to the poems we love. And that will still be true for *Grasshopper*.

NOTES:

- i www.shitcreek.auszine.com/issue13
- ii www.ramblingrose.com/grasshopper/goodbye_grasshopper.htm
- iii www.ablemuse.com/erato/showthread.php?t=5707

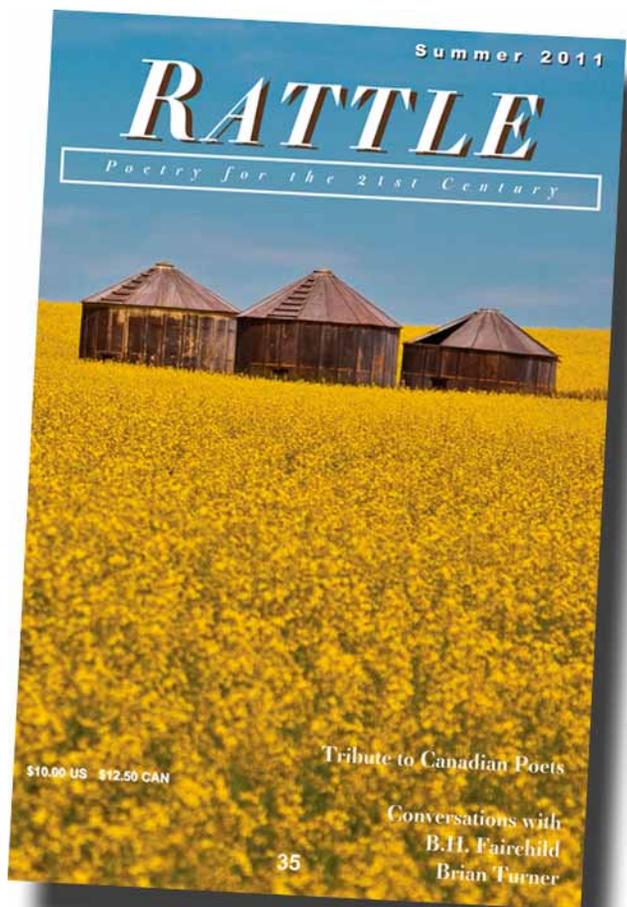


MARYANN CORBETT is the author of two chapbooks, *Dissonance* (Scienter Press, 2009) and *Gardening in a Time of War* (Pudding House, 2007). She is a past winner of the Willis Barnstone Translation Prize and a past finalist for the Morton Marr prize. Her poems, essays, and translations have appeared in many journals in print and online, including *River Styx*, *Atlanta Review*, *The Evansville Review*, *Literary Imagination*, *Subtropics*, and *The Dark Horse*, as well as *The Able Muse Anthology* and the forthcoming *Hot Sonnets*. She lives in St. Paul and works for the Minnesota Legislature.



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TRIBUTE TO CANADIAN POETS

Releasing in June, *RATTLE* #35 travels north to explore the vast expanse of Canadian Poetry. Canada is a population smaller than that of California, spread across one of the largest and most geographically diverse countries on earth. The resulting poetry is a symphony of movements, both regional and stylistic, and a group of writers that are as vibrant and varied as the landscape itself. Never afraid to experiment, and equally comfortable with traditional form, this is by far the most eclectic tribute we've ever put together—and with 33 poets spanning 50 pages, it's also the largest.

Of course, the Canadian tribute is only part of the issue. *RATTLE* #35's open section features the work of 41 poets, including Patricia Lockwood's epic examination of the word "Popeye." (You read that right.) Also, Alan Fox interviews two former lathe machinists: narrative master B.H. Fairchild and Iraq War veteran Brian Turner.

TRIBUTE TO CANADIAN POETS

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ARTWORK
 Paul Lacroix

CONVERSATIONS
 B.H. Fairchild
 Brian Turner



from RATTLE #35, WINTER 2010

Poetry

Brendan Constantine

“SO GOD WILL KNOW YOU”

after Miroslav Valek

Go out, get us some money
 and kill a dog. Take this coat,
 this book of matches, a knife
 from the wall to kill a dog
 on the way. You need medicine;
 if not now, you will—*aspirin*,
quinine, a packet of God.
 These things are still strong
 enough to heal the country
 and kill a dog. Sulfur traps
 in their intestines, from fruit,
 toad stools; any limb off
 a chocolate rabbit is death,
 as it happens. This happens,
 we spread a newspaper, cut
 an onion, wait with each other.
 You kill a dog; a shepherd, a bull,
 a fool hound. Tell whoever
 complains the dog has killed
 your dog first, your older dog.
 They won't persist. The earth
 is fed on the incorrigible. People
 here worship this about the land;
 that it is made rich by eating
 thieves: the rabbit, the crow,
 the pale gopher. Thus and so
 we light a fire in a fireplace
 and read half our book. Or sleep
 in our beds and wake standing
 by the window. If we call out,
 the dogs inside us run away,
 then creep back. They can
 never come under our hands,
 their softnesses. You must
 keep the right things with you,
 the family spoons, good spoons

to trade, to dig, to attract a dog.
 You must expect to lose these
 or not get enough for them. Have
 some tea or ginger in your pocket
 to offer the hermit, the widow
 who takes you in against night,
 the wild boy-man who thinks
 he must be alone. Have a way
 to mention us so they know
 you cannot linger. At dawn
 come home with money;
 on the way, kill a dog.

Saara Myrene Raappana

A BATTLESHIP EXAMINES ITS FAITH

I dream
 towels, dust streams,
 a downpour of talcum.
 I dream arid fields of sorghum.
 But down where I'm fattest: frogmen swimming
 on wave-wings, stoking my belly with the kindling
 of justice. Captain, I'm a billion-shot salute, but guns
 aren't made to pull their own triggers. The Baltic makes me run
 until my sides buckle but won't let me collapse.
 I call this salt-soup Heaven, but perhaps
 I'm misdirected. The angels
 of my dreams never change:
 unarmed and dry,
 they fly.



from **RATTLE #35, WINTER 2010**

Tribute to Canadian Poets

David Cavanagh

FUGUE

for Ken

Death whips with perfect indifference, flays
feeling to the bone. My brother's gone. Day

barrels implacably on, just like Auden said
of Brueghel's painting: nobody twigged,

not even on the passing ship, as Icarus
screamed out of the sky into a silent sea.

Now taxis keep pulling into traffic. An email
from the boss still sets execs in motion.

A homeless woman slumped like a played-out
oracle by the pharmacy wall still holds up

her sign: "Anything will help." I doubt it.
A fabric has been torn. His last full weekend,

we gathered round his bed. Chat zigged
to the notion of a fugue state. Someone said

what's a fugue? He listened to us fumble for a while,
then broke in, breath sawing, said how layer

builds on contrapuntal layer, returns at last to theme.
With rasping lung, finger tracing time in air,

he dum-da-dummed ascending tiers of Beethoven,
stopped and breathed, "That's it."

⌘ ⌘

To hell with art. To hell with Breughel, Auden,
this crap, too. But he would not say so. He loved

the sublime—the Sistine splendours, basilica'd
expanse of the Piazza San Marco, Austen's subtleties,

the gardens of de Lotbinière, a fine Bordeaux.
Nurtured dream the way achievers must.

A masted yacht just off the coast still takes
no notice. Billowed sails, an unfamiliar flag,

the captain's wheel glinting like a sundial, the bow
slicing the blue-green shimmer underneath it all.

My brother stands alone by the gleaming rail.
A flash of white through air to sea. A gasp

as he points. Was that a boy? He strains for
the merest splash. Waves fall back into their theme.

Kind eyes bright, he leans into his astonishment.



from **RATTLE #35, WINTER 2010**

Tribute to Canadian Poets

Michael Lavers

CODA

From the garden rose the sound of bees
that lurched and wobbled through the peonies.
We ate eggs, French toast, drank milk that warmed
in minutes in the sun while fat drones swarmed
and looped like drunkards in the purple field.
On the porch we heard their bodies yield
to wills their fuzzy minds don't understand.
They smelled the stains of syrup on your hand
and one, in gold-encrusted drunken strut,
smeared pollen from its mandibles and gut
along your wrist. That morning you had tied
your hair, and as you rose and ran inside,
it gently bounced, and loosed, and then unfurled.
If the next is better, I'll still miss this world.

Patrick M. Pilarski

YOUR VILLAGE

slipknot, aerosol

or invertebrate, a thing
spineless

drawn out in sections and rewired
to complete the circuit

hot light
in each alcove, insomniac
the green yellow eyes

of a cat, blinking
in the dark

nothing put to sleep.



from RATTLE #35, WINTER 2010

Tribute to Canadian Poets

Rachel Rose

WHAT WE HEARD ABOUT THE CANADIANS

We heard they were not American.
Not British and not quite French.

They were not born in Hong Kong
did not immigrate from Russia with one pair of shoes.

They were not all russet-haired orphans
who greeted the apple blossom dawn with open arms,

crying *Avonlea!* They were not immodest,
did not want God to save the Queen.

Their leaders were not corrupt, no;
they were not all Mounties on proud horseback

with hot tasers. Nor did they shit hockey pucks.
Fuck me was not considered impolite in their living rooms.

It was not just the weather that made them curse.
Not just frozen lakes cracked under the weight of the moon.

There was no great Canadian hush of things not to be talked about.
They did not ride sled dogs to the prom,

nor fight off polar bears for a chunk of Narwhal blubber.
Cod-stacking was not their Olympic sport.

Wedding guests did not dine on icicle, nor did the bride
wear a toque over a white veil. Not all of them

ignored genocide. Not all of them sang a “cold
and broken Hallelujah” as the bells broke crystal ice

across Parc Lafontaine. They were not rich and also
not poor. Not overachievers. Neither believers nor unbelievers.

C'était pas tout l'histoire, and they would not
be caught clubbing seals on TV, red bloom

on white coat, melting eyes, they did not mine asbestos
in Quebec, make love in skidoos,

sleep in snowshoes. Never danced hatless
under dancing Northern lights. They were polite.



from RATTLE #35, WINTER 2010

Tribute to Canadian Poets

Rachel Rose

WHAT WE HEARD ABOUT THE AMERICANS

We heard there was much to admire about the Americans.
Historically.

Their cuisine is buffet, all you can
overeat.

We heard they hire whisperers, buy guides for
idiots.

Foster special needs kittens. Are visited by
aliens.

We heard the Americans are our
brethren.

That they keep ten percent of black men
imprisoned.

Are stockpiling weapons for
Armageddon.

Believe that all good dogs go to
heaven.

God bless the Americans. God bless their inalienable
freedoms.

Bless Guantanamo. Americans sure know how to have
fun.

Even their deaths are more important than our
own.

Happiness is cosmetic
dentistry.

The global dream is the American
dream.

Liberty is a statue holding a soft ice
cream.

final Judge:
You!

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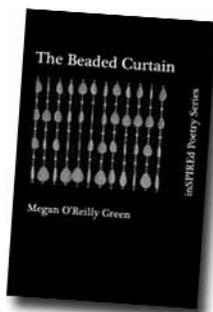
Red Hen Press, 2009, 104 pp., \$18.95

THE BEADED CURTAIN by Megan Green

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