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Editorial

The next issue of Rampike (Volume 9, #2), will investigate encounters with environments and anti-environments. Submissions dealing with interactions with a range of various environments are invited. Emphasis will be given to works that address environments-as-media (including social, natural, mechanical, liquid, gaseous, mineral, conceptual, tactile, acoustic, olfactory, visual, and so on. These also include the printed page, electronic circuitry, the human body and the mind, both consciousness and unconsciousness, as well as anti-environments such as vacuums, etc). The issue will question how interactions with different environments-as-media, serve to develop or generate modes of creative expression. Deadline: November 1st, 1997. We welcome writing as well as documentations of visual and performative arts. Works are welcome in either French or English. Please see our submission guidelines in the masthead.

The following issue of Rampike (Volume 10, #1), will explore electronic and anti-electronic venues. Works are invited that explore the earliest to the most contemporary forms of electric and electronic cultures (static electricity, morse-code, radio, television, computer culture, electronic music, electronically assisted visual art, performance, hypertext, star-wars, bio-electrics, cyber-space, McLuhan, etc). We also welcome works that adopt a counter-electronic posture (including pre-electronic conditions, cider-space rather than cyber-space, telepathy rather than telegraph, fire rather than light-bulb, abacus rather than computer, and/or the position of the luddite). Emphasis will be given to works that investigate how creative expression has reacted to, or has been affected by the advent of electronics. We welcome writing as well as documentations of visual and performative arts. Deadline: February 1st, 1998. Works are welcome in either French or English. Please see our submission guidelines in the masthead.

With this issue of Rampike (Volume 9/1), we participate in the drama of the human condition. Human inter-relationships have been depicted for centuries using a variety of genres and here we offer a humble few including theatre, fiction, poetry, performance art, sculpture, and graphic art. Such expressions can be aloof or engaging, detached or inter-active. A spectrum of possibilities rises up to meet both artist and audience. And, it is the expression itself which serves as the medium between creator and receiver, between conception and reception, bridging the gap, or sometimes, offering only a thread, a thin trace of a distant, nearly forgotten thought. In this issue, we feature artists and writers from around the world who have chosen the arena of human interaction as the subject for a drama sometimes meant for a broad audience and the main stage, and other times reserved for an audience of one; for your mind only. Sliding from action to thought, the theatrical and other modes herein, stage a range of approaches, from the openly social, to the purely formal, from the provocative to the evocative. In so many places around the world, the social fabric is unravelling revealing the warp and woof, loosening the threads. Gather up your vestments. If life is but a stage, and we, but actors, then by taking a step, or turning the page, you engage in the action of this human drama. We are our own fictions encountering our own depictions. If this is the medium, then you are both message and messenger. The curtains rise, you are an actor on stage about to move, the end of a long thread rests in your hand...

Text/Images from:
A Geomantic Cartography of London Ontario
by Peter Jaeger (London, Canada)
A Play by Marie-Claire Blais
Translated by Nigel Spencer

CHARACTERS
SHE
HE
ORLIEF

Voices of a man and woman, hushed. The tone of this dialogue is at times rather
neutral and detached or distant; it is intercut with silences, hesitations and
whisperings.

SHE: You have to tell me how long... how much longer we have to live in this
country? Fifteen years is such a long time to be away from our people... so far away
and among strangers, fifteen! (Then, as if her husband had slammed his spoon on the
table to impose silence, or perhaps share a secret code:) Alright, I know... I’ll try to
put up with them, just as you have, but you have got to understand I have not got the
same patience or selflessness. And above all, I certainly do not want to die here. You
know. You know perfectly well, a simple slip of the tongue, a flash of rebelliousness,
anything, and it’s all over to-morrow... or tonight, whenever.

HE: Patience is a strength that brings its own rewards.

SHE: Patience cannot comfort you if you feel alone and desolate.

SHE: You don’t feel alone with so many friends from all over the world
dropping in non-stop?

SHE: Oh, yes, they come and tell us about a joy of living we no longer know
anything about. Then they leave, often for good.

HE: We do have each other, all these treasures, all these books... and hopes... that
we can share between us. Of course, you are bored. I know that. I really do. Why not
I’ve taken root here, I suppose, in this very place which you find more and more
hostile, and threatening every day.

SHE: It isn’t mine. It isn’t ours. We have known freedom before, and that is all
there can ever really be for us.

SHE: You have got to get away and live somewhere else. You’re still young, and you
do love adventure.

SHE: I couldn’t. You know I’d be ashamed all of a sudden, living just for myself,
when you are exactly the opposite. You are devoted to others. Why, you are even
ready to give up your life for total strangers. I could escape, I suppose, make it to my
friends across the border, but what would be the point? I’d risk losing you and these
hours we have together. Besides, you do still need me, don’t you, just a little?

HE: I wonder what this house would become without you, your joy, your enthusiasm.
I suppose I am just a sort of refuge, a haven for an ideal, abstract ideas, perhaps... a
life of the soul that the world has given up or passed by.

SHE: Oh, the life of the soul here has died. They have snuffed it out.

HE: Shh! Don’t say that! Besides, who knows, maybe The Three Sisters will go on
tour to Moscow.

SHE: No, no. They will never make it to Moscow. Instead there are three invisible
guards at your door. They don’t even speak our language. Their voices are sharp and
brutal, if you’ve ever listened. (A range of harsh and incoherent sounds; then she
continues in an everyday tone:) Then, maybe I’ll just dream. No, I hear them
endlessly. They are spiteful voices that never leave me in peace. (She opens the
window. He comes over to the window. It is so beautiful, so remote, out there on the
bridge. Do you think they are still there... watching us with their frigid eyes devoid of
the slightest intelligence? I mean, intelligence is akin to generosity, and they have long
since stopped thinking about those they watch... or if they do, only as future prisoners.
Yet, those eyes of theirs follow us everywhere... even through the snow, through the
morning mist, or at dawn as I walk on the bridge... thinking I’m alone.

HE: That is just your fear talking...

SHE: Yes, of course, that’s all it is.

HE: ...after all, it’s been very cold this year.

SHE: ...an eternal, pitiless cold.

HE: In Italy, you would have the children with you, wouldn’t you, and all the other
things you love so much.

SHE: Yes, but that sort of life would soon turn sour if you weren’t there. Besides,
they are already treating you so badly here. You know your pain would haunt me.
There! Do you hear them... the voices? They are very close now, just the other side of
the bridge.

HE: Yes, it still does happen on Sundays. In some churches, you can hear them
praying...

(These voices, resembling a choir, convey a religious seriousness -- rather like
Gregorian chant. It may include women’s or children’s voices, but it should be very
austerely.)

SHE: What courage it must take to love God when you are forbidden to! If I were
them, I would not even feel like praying.

HE: When you walk across the bridge at dawn, are you quite sure it isn’t to get nearer
to that little church buried in the snow, so you can listen to the voices?

SHE: I don’t know. I go walking on the bridge out of boredom. I’m at a loss in this
city. Who do you suppose they are, these people who still want to pray?

HE: Perhaps they feel they are in danger -- men and women who have lost everything.

SHE: But why do they insist on expressing their faith when there is no god to listen
to? Isn’t it strange to think that in this world secret battles are still being fought for
a right we thought everyone had a birth, the right to think, to believe, to hope... even
in a vengeful and cruel god who allows humans to crush one another?

HE: They sing and pray with simplicity. They don’t torment themselves needlessly
with the concern that we have. They have chosen a god in their own image.

SHE: What wasted hopes! It tears me apart to hear their lamentations up to an absent
god or, if he even exists, a ruthless dictator of a god, just like the people who rule
over them. It hurts me because I am, first an foremost, and egoist. Yes, that is right,
and you had better believe it! After all, in real life it is this little, ignoble fault that
saves us. And I still have the will to save all that I am and all that I was yesterday.
This must be how it starts, this disease of oppression. First, one does not really feel
anything, all sealed up in a beautiful house in a lovely city: a gorgeous place... where
only strangers visit. One eats, drinks all one could possibly want, lacking nothing. It is
almost possible to be fooled into feeling at home, into continuing one’s fashionable,
phony life, into believing... No, now listen. Don’t try to muddle me. This disease of
oppression suddenly starts to spread, and the oppressor, who before seemed only to
watch from far off, very far in fact, is all at once there... right inside you, never to be
forgotten. He eats with you, sleeps with you, betrays you in every smile from a
loved one. One can never be cured of it. It’s already too late.

(The religious chant fades.)

HE: (Repeats several times:) The Prince comes forward to meet and embrace his
enemy, but finds only death. (The repetitions of this sentence gradually fade under, as
the woman continues:)

SHE: He is right... I could leave. The border is not very far away. A world I still
belong to continues to bustle and thrive on the other side. All these years of silence
and fear... perhaps they were no more than a bad dream. This strange life of ours has
completely changed my husband. He is no longer a man, more of a saint.
He has been able to broaden his destiny, while mine has just shrunk to captivity. Perhaps
I didn’t have enough strength and depth of character to make it here. Like so many
others, maybe... maybe I just was not born with it.

(A pleasantry, perhaps lighter, music gradually shifts the mood.)

SHE: Though it is natural for someone to want comfort and happiness. We used to be
like that once, before they sent us here to this forbidding corner of the world, deaf to it
all and crashed by the heavy silence of despots. All of these years, we have been
witness to silent torments, although we were never actually permitted to see the death-
torture chambers. That was our special horror: this invisibility, this humiliating
feeling of powerlessness that follows voiceless murderers wherever they go. Across the
border, on the other side, oh we had joyous music every night, and so many guests
that we forgot their faces, and a richly-laden table. We were respected and loved:
wasn’t that hard to believe my life had reached its pinnacle. All my desires were fulfilled:
such checking from where our lives are so fragile. I suppose it was a life I should be
ashamed of, but I did so love my worldly pleasures, and I never felt any shame,
because I had the arrogance of the strong. And while I dazzled myself with others just
like me, my husband must surely have been brooding on the emptiness of it all. We
were quite ready to go on living happily, without helping a soul, nor even having the
slightest notion of offending them, for we were far too indifferent. No, an intelligent
man could not possibly have resigned himself to such a life. At first, we put it down to
the difference in our ages, but it was really the gap between two beings -- even when
they love as we did -- one of whom had a soul and a heart, and one did not. God must
surely have sent him here like this... to die, just as surely as I want to live. First, the
house was just a refuge for our endangered cultural heritage: a painter or a sculptor
brought by the state would hide his work with us, and literature provided us with
codes: would The Three Sisters go to Moscow; would the paintings make it across the
border? We ourselves became heroes in the play, the writing that was our life, our
game of life-and-death. Yet all this time, I thought, no, we must not offer ourselves up
to anonymous executioners. After all, we are only foreigners here, aren’t we? Here,
there is no one for us to save. Perhaps this fear was mine only. And then this symbolic
language that we used became more and more obscure between us. We were now
alone in different universes. This prison closed in on me, while my husband, wholly
absorbed in his conquest of the spirit, became more and more remote. He forgot the
simple fun of our earlier life together, there, on the other side, where we thought we
had lived. Whoever came to him asking for refuge, he protected, he reassured them...
for a few hours or a few moments. He would take in a family of frail
beings that we would never see again: artists, writers and others -- they all seemed
headed toward the same destruction when they left here, from the moment we saw
them off down the street, frozen and silent... oh so silent.

(The religious choir returns in the background.)
SHE: Do you remember the professor who came back so many times?
HE: Oh, Orlief, the one who wrote so much about Bossuet.
SHE: Didn't he write poetry as well?
HE: That's right; he'd write a few poems, then nothing. He promised to read to me, but...
SHE: Have you noticed, he doesn't come for Sunday tea any more?
HE: No, we never saw him again. He was the one who introduced me to the beauty of this sacred music. Listen to it. Such peace... and hope!
SHE: He was well known in these parts, but Bossuet, why Bossuet? Fifteen years spent talking about only one man — surely that's a spiritual death-sentence. Have you ever thought of that?
HE: Of course, but Orlief was not like you or me. For example, he was highly sensitive to those voices that you hear, voices from another world. What did it matter to him if he kept starting over and over again, like a schoolboy being punished? His faith was unsalable. Listen, I often think of him when I hear this office...
SHE: What if Orlief found safe haven somewhere? What if one day someone risked his life for Orlief?
HE: Oh, that would have to be pointless. The poor fellow's work probably died with him.
SHE: Yet, he had it all: a superb apartment, even elegant clothes of the kind you never see here. You would have thought from looking at him that he had actually known freedom at one time or another.
HE: Maybe, but the man had a tortured smile that hadn't spoken to anyone in a long time.
SHE: He went everywhere with us: museums, theaters; he took me by the arm and was so good for me, yet so distant at the same time. Whenever I questioned him too directly, he'd start talking on a look of infinite sadness. And once again the silence would return, a quiet politeness to hide behind. We had lost a friend. Didn't you feel that?
HE: How can anyone know what a captive is thinking?
SHE: One evening, we went into town for supper, and we were all very jolly, remember? Then, in those bubbly hours, I really talked to Orlief; if only he'd wanted to discuss something besides Bossuet and his other intellectual pursuits, I mean real passions. I thought, "If only he would talk about himself," but all he gave me was that look of his, and of course, silence. All of a sudden, he said, "Don't ask me questions. I'm too tired. I've had a two-year rest-cure." So, where did he go to recover? Why was such a healthy, vigorous man in need of a rest?
(The religious music comes closer.)
SHE: He was out there, far away, across those vast deserts of snow... resting indeed! They had anaesthetized his body and soul. When he came back, he had completely stopped talking about the infant Jesus he so liked in those paintings. He had totally forgotten the museums we had visited together. Sometimes he mentioned his country's past, distant mind you, centuries ago. Perhaps he was simply keeping the image of the martyred Christ-child quietly locked up in his heart, or perhaps too he really had forgotten it. He used to say sometimes, as we strode through the libraries in town; "Come with me. All our treasures lie sleeping underground, in caves. Despite everything, we have preserved all the manuscripts, every work of art. Come, come! We'll have to go down below the surface of the earth, though. One can get used to anything," or did I just dream he talked to me like that? Together, we went down to those dusty, underground libraries. Yes, I remember now, ancient manuscripts, marvels languishing in their glass prisons, each honorable thought resting in its own coffin.
Grey-faced guards, men and women worn down by their long sojourn in the shadows, rushed towards us, surrounded us and explained in a torrent of words that it was forbidden to go too far, too far... or to touch, of course. And all around us were murmurings and whispers. Perhaps the guards had noticed we were being lied to, that the texts had been drastically cut; essential parts were missing from manuscripts. Maybe it was because evil and weakness should not exist. In this bizarre society, robbery, rape and crime were no longer temptations or mistakes. God was not there to redeem humans any more, and people redeemed themselves with their own blood.
Crimes simply began a chain of punishment; man repressed man, and nobody dared to call it the Age of the Grand Inquisitor. Shortly after this lie was exposed, or rather this age of lies, Orlief left us for the sea-side, because it was warmer there, or so he said. It was his way, his way of pursuing his illness, and he was waiting there for him. That's all...
HE: Yes, yes, because you are leaving tomorrow. They will come and fetch you. Then you can join the children in Italy. Write me.
SHE: No, I am not abandoning you. Is this how highly you value my love for you? Are you really in such a hurry to die alone? This is what happens when a man turns to no avail. Then I...
HE: Well, I actually wanted to tell you about a dream I had. I was alone, walking through one of the cathedrals in town. Maybe I was looking for Orlief, but even while I was under the stone vaults — although I didn't find him — I did hear the voices of this choir, chanting and praying, just as we are hearing them this morning. These unrelenting laments comforted me, and as I listened to them, I thought, "Of course, it's true; these heroes we admire in the great books, like the writers who created them haven't they lived only for those moments of exaltation, those few moments of glory... before being snuffed out under the austere heavens that never seem to hear our cries?"
I suddenly felt such enormous relief! Perhaps, after all, that's what prayer means for so many people... forgetting about this world, forgetting about oppression and earthly injustice, and knowing at least a moment's harmony with oneself. I love you, Orlief, try to pull yourselves.
SHE: Orlief, Orlief... and what if my husband were hiding him here, underground, with all the hopes he still nurses, still desperately keeps alive to give us a more human community? What if he were close by, listening to the voices of the choir as they come nearer, getting stronger and more substantial, while the guards — pretending to be asleep in the streets — come closer, too, marching to their beat of hatred and revenge. After all, don't they despise anything they can't understand? Orlief, it's me. Don't be afraid. Can you hear me?
ORLIEF: (In a broken accent:) Yes. I have been here a long time. Why can't they stop singing? Someone will be sent to wipe them out, every last one of them. I've written a lot of poems while I was under your roof, but who is going to read them if all are killed? Listen to what your husband says: leave tomorrow. I'll be alright alone. I've given up Bossuet, you know. At last I am able to breathe... and to write. Have there been any letters for me?
SHE: No, and they are looking for you.
ORLIEF: Ah, they decided I still need more rest!
SHE: Alright, so that's it. My husband is here, watching and waiting. They'll never get through the door. You are safe here.
ORLIEF: When you think about your homeland, don't you get sad and homesick?
SHE: Oh, if only you knew... that's the worst thing of all -- homesickness -- even when you are prisoner.
ORLIEF: It's true. I'd forgotten that. My children and I have lived in different worlds for so long that even when they come home for holidays, there is something between us, a tragedy, this silence maybe, that they do not even notice. They are still too young and carefree, as I once was. And of course, this last for life is drying up in me. That too might cut me off from the ones I love.
ORLIEF: Listen to the voices. They are singing a hymn to life, while our death is being prepared for us. You know, back there, in that home for sick teachers where I stayed by the sea, the place we call The House of Sleep, you asked me one day what became of the criminals and thieves. Well, I can tell you now that we are alone. There is nothing between us but your fear and mine, plus that blind courage of your husband's. We are all alone in this dark, underground place, while the snow falls endlessly on the city. Thieves and killers no longer exist, except in books from the past. There, by the sea, they were "desensitized" to their vices. Have you ever noticed in attempting to exterminate evil, society only succeeds in killing the germs of its own life... never what it sets out to do. I have seen thieves and criminals walk straight into their deaths, without ever seeing them coming. No one said, "You will be shot at dawn." No one said anything... just silence and doubt. Then, one morning, a man fails to wake up, killed by surprise. I did not want to be one of those; I wanted to look my death in the face, like you, like so many others, and I wanted to taste those moments of freedom, fleeting and sovereign, where one really does have the impression, well at least the illusion anyway, that life on this planet is a different reality from the one which we have perceived. Torture... you also asked me how people were able to bear torture. Well, a man with no memory is no longer the same. That, that was the greatest torment for our poets who were kept prisoner there. First, their memories were suppressed. This was the death of the spirit. It happened, oh so gently and suddenly.
One day, when they wanted to evoke the Imperial Garden where Pushkin had played as a child, well, they no longer remembered. Their souls had become those stagnant pools of blood and lifeless, which suddenly stretch across my desolate memory.
SHE: I was on my way back from a trip once. I had just crossed the border and was waiting for my husband at the airport, when I saw a young man who was drunk. It was odd, Orlief; I had noticed his youthfulness, because one sees so few young faces here. He was standing up, but drunk, with a tattered bouquet of roses in his hand. He led a charmed life, Orlief. I was really struck by that; Fate had stretched out its hand to this young man and saved him, because he was drunk and angry, and no guard had yet approached him. It was as though the image of beauty and fury incarnated by this angry young man floated, hovered, above their pathetic watchfulness.
ORLIEF: Perhaps he is singing, and becoming one with the church this morning.
SHE: I thought perhaps he might be... I had this dream that maybe the boy's revolt, his beauty, might break his chains. That was the last I saw of him, though I often went back to the airport, thinking perhaps he'd drop in for a drink... to no avail. Then I thought of waiting for him at dawn on the bridge. Possibly no brothers, no friends, no one. He'll never return. It was a vision. Someone's been hiding him... but one thing I can say, to you alone; his absence afflicts me more than the absence of my own children.
ORLIEF: You had the gift of freedom to offer him and were prevented.
SHE: With this void, everything started to shrivel within and around me. In a land as vast as this, isn't it possible for a clever slave to escape and disappear into the vastness itself? Or is it like death, an endless plain with no horizon, invaded by the trembling and terrified shadow of one who is oppressed by the light and can flee no more?
In dreams, I see the ancient forests, with their enclaves and isolated clearings, but everywhere under the trees there are refuges, sometimes entire families wrapped in tattered clothing, with their animals. In my dreams, neither you nor I can be saved.
SHE: Here as elsewhere, they will see spring and summer again, but it won’t be real.

SHE: Do you sometimes hear them, the others, calling, begging you to save them?

HE: Orlief, Orlief, can you hear me? Are you hungry, or thirsty? Can I get you anything?

ORLIEF: (In the same broken voice and accent as before): No, I am no longer as hungry or thirsty as I once used to be. Have they stripped my house bare? Are all my books burnt? Do you remember, I had a rare edition of Kafka?

HE: You no longer own anything but the shadows of our sub-basement, Orlief. Your hungry or thirsty as I once used to be. Have they stripped your house bare? Are all my books burnt? Do you remember, I had a rare edition of Kafka?

ORLIEF: No, hope betrayed is all it was. In just a few hours, those poor, prayerful people will all be killed. Go. You have got to go, you and your wife. She does not know I am here yet, among all these books and art works you so heedlessly keep under your roof.

HE: Orlief, without your faith, what would become of you? Who on earth has a right to take your inner life away from you? You are a wise man who has always lived for an ideal. Are they really going to live in to the barbarism and vulgarities of the ones who want to strip you of your soul?

ORLIEF: You just cannot see the atrocious spectacle I carry in my heart: think of the thousands who will be beaten and humiliated for just a moment of the sublime in a little church. Already, I can see the troops surrounding it in an instant. God, oh God. All the mangled innocence, innocent bodies condemned to torture! Yes, I did use to be a wise man, perhaps even a member of the intellectual elite... and who was that, exactly? I am talking, of course, about a man who is no more. The faith of simple people did use to affect me. Other souls brought me to life, but I was not on their side. Like so many others here, I was falled and fooled. Afraid, I kept silent. My volumes on Bosmet brought me plaudits and rewards. I accepted them all. Then I began to revolt. I started writing like a human. I pushed aside the shameful glory that they had thrown like a coat over my lies. Oh no! Everything had to be said: my friends with the courage for truth departed, never to return to this world of invisible oppression in which I myself had lived and breathed. Then the court decided it was my turn to go. I was worn out. A stay by the sea would do me a lot of good.

HE: Is it always this way? Is there always some monster buried deep ready to erupt in us? For you it was fear, and for me... well, a life of lies, too, in a selfish society thinking only of its pleasures. I have read all your books, learned your language. I have known your people through your literature, and I have become one of you. It is not you that hides in this house; it is me. Please keep me here, for I cannot go back there. I could sing prayers in your language, and I could be one of those victims still praying in your little church, maybe the only one in the whole city still standing amid the fire and the destruction...

ORLIEF: Yes, but this will soon be over. Listen, the soldiers are nearby here. (As the sound of the onrush of troops to the church increases, the frail voices of the one we were with the violent clamour described by Orlief.)

ORLIEF: The hammering of boots on the ground... listen to it, listen... it is hate that rules the world. The chant of love will soon be strangled.

SHE: What are they chanting? I don’t understand. I often went out onto the bridge, and I heard melodious voices, but what did the words mean... what? Do I have a right to understand? I have always loved only one world, and that was the one I lived in. It offered me earthly happiness, often mediocre perhaps, but one I had chosen.

HE: (Chanting slightly or praying:) Have pity on us, Lord Have pity on us, Lord Thou art our only refuge. (His tone similar:) The pity for our errors, Lord. Thy anger breaketh us. We are poor people, Lord, and the awful sleep will fall upon us. The awful sleep. HE: Have pity on us, Lord. ORLIEF: The awful sleep. HE: Thou art our only refuge. ORLIEF: Will fall upon us. There they are! Burning through the hallowed doors. It does not take long to kill the weak. Now the choir falls silent. Soon, we will hear the hammering of boots across the bridge. How cruel is thy pity, Lord!

THE DARK FUTURE
Excerpt from Baroque at Dawn
a Novel by Nicole Brossard
Translated by Patricia Claxton

Nicole Brossard’s innovative work has appeared in Rampike on several occasions in the past. She has won the Governor General’s award twice, as well as the prestigious Prix Athenae-David in Quebec. "The Dark Future" is a sub-section of Brossard’s latest Novel Baroque at Dawn (McEland & Stewar, Toronto). Patricia Claxton has won a Governor General’s award for her translation of Gabrielle Roy’s autobiography Enchantment and Sorrow. Some of the other literary luminaries Claxton has translated include Jacques Godbout, Fernand Ouellet, Jacques Hébert, Gérard Peletier and Pierre Elliot Trudeau.

Reality superimposed itself on reality. There was something heady indeed about the blue, something beguiling, begging to be crossed through. Corals sprang to view, like exploded rose petals to be touched gently. I learned to float with aplomb and with the current, and to resist it hand and foot in order to steer around large luridous obstacles. Fascinated to have these arabesques assure my equilibrium in the lavish blue. I swam serenely toward the bottom, borne by a state of euphoria the like of which I had never felt before that day. Fluidity of gesture. A current of happiness and my skin breathing straight from the water’s caress. Very soon I found myself in a forest of kurb, curious and intrigued at first, then careful to avoid the wrack fronds that could wrap around me like an inescapable trap.

No notion whatever of time. Nothing but a space open to impressions. Being, living tissue gobbled up by the unknown. A vagillation of senses amid new meanings, channelling energy through one’s blood vessels toward new sources of energy.

In exemplary solitude, a slow, horizontal me in a watery dream that added to the wonder of dreaming.

Water that had swallowed the tears and bodies of thousands of women drowned, this same water in its unreal depth allowed me to be like a sponge. I soaked up the sweat and tears, all the liquids deposited deep in the abyss by the dangerous thinking that had compelled so many women to hurl themselves into it alive or become caught and dragged down, discouraged that terra firma had failed utterly to fulfill its promise of life.

I was out of context, close to meaning and at the same time removed from things that ravage the senses. I was a floating, animal, fabulous thing brimming with good will.

I wanted to observe everything. Yet no way could I hold my attention longer than a second on a single creature or a single coral. Either the object would become part of my silence and acquire such proportions that I would let the substance bearing its stories and anecdotes go to my head, or it would slip away, leaving me alone in the midst of an explosion of visual fragments that I could clearly not manage to visualize or contextualize.

Suddenly, I was thirsty. An immeasurable thirst that grew as my eye synthesized the present.

I was present and nothing but, an illusion of perfect present, devoid of story or any contextualization. Locked in a present in which all my life I had proclaimed essential for doing justice to the intelligence of our senses. Now there was too much present. I tore off the visorhelmet and gloves, exhausted and trembling.

Philippine handed me a glass of water. Beside me, Irène was making little hand gestures. I could see her chin and cheeks moving constantly, animated by all that rich, eventful life played out in the screens that her eyes had become.

That evening, although I was tired, I fell upon my manuscript as if it held a solution capable of foiling the double time. As if entering lesson were the only way to return to reality. A strange thing happened: the sentences, instead of following sequentially and obediently one after the other, superimposed themselves one over the other, worrisome and transparent like a desire to surf on words, eliminating risk of harm by meaning. Obedience on the one hand, superficiality on the other. Meaning checkmarked. The present was never-ending.

A world was dramatizing in me. Characters were filling the universe with their superiority as talking beings. I wanted to rework the dialogue begun between La Struzine and Cybil Noland, but there was already too much body between them. I
thought briefly that I would have to take a place myself between them. Take the place
of one, put myself in the place of the other, as philosophers do sometimes the better to
see as well as be at the century's end, when, moving from posture to posture as
others move from city to city, they smear themselves with another's scent and go
about giving off, taking care afterwards to moisten their lips with a vigorous sweep
of the tongue.

Sleep Came.

And a dream. I’m walking on René-Lévesque Boulevard under an adequate sky.
Outside Mary Queen of the World Cathedral, tour buses, grey nastodons. On the
cathedral steps, emaciated men hold out baseball caps for charity as others do their
hands. I go in. I walk up the main aisle. Large pictures on either side draw my
attention. Long-haired Indians, French soldiers, women named Jeanne Manne, Marquerie Bourgeois, Mère d’Youville. A hospital burns, Indians paddle. Their canoe is
in imminent risk of being swept away by the raging waters. A painting in the left
arcade of the restaurant intrigues me. I approach. A title: The Marryedom of the Jesuit
Fathers J. de Brebeuf and G. Lalemant in the Land of the Hurons 1649. Indians are
sitting around the wood fire. In the middle, I recognize Padre Sinocchio. Bare-chested,
hands bound to a wooden stake, he is beseecching heaven. Around his neck, a necklace
of red-hot polished stones cut in the shape of tomatawkas. In the background, another
Jesuit is victim of the laws of perspective. Their faces show no trace of pain, hatred or
cruelty. Sinocchio is intent, his gaze turned patiently toward Heaven. The Indians have
finished his soup this evening before throwing out, like a pair of dice in the middle of
the book. Over the book and the future. I ended up on deck unsuccessful. A little gust
of wind on my cheeks. Such beauty, such pleasure in the beauty of the day and the
sea. Fifteen metres away, Thomas Lemieux was standing straight, gazing into the
luminous distance of the morning. He was drumming on the rail, his forefingers
tapping, an orgy of tap-ups borne by the wind in my direction. Face turned to the
sun, eyelids closed, mouth round and filled with mastication and concotion, his voice
would whisper then «well like a rock-singer’s barking yesses and nas, yes, vibrate of
fingertips, melody. Beat. Silence. He would slowly drink in the wind and hold still
until with tap and tatata and little jerks of hips, the sounds would spew anew from far
down a ruined throat: "If you see the wonder...I have a dream...I believe in angels." 1

As though he had breathed my presence, Lemieux turned toward me just as I was
preparing to turn and retrace my steps, embarrassed to see him thus or so caught up in
the beauty of the day. Our eyes met. A character.

Flash was looking for me. With virile flourish, he consulted his watch. "Let’s hurry.
Strong sensations today." Minutes later, hooked up and masked, I was diving in a new
world. A gloomy landscape. Tall, chimney-shaped rocks spewing black, very black
water. At the base of the chimney, a colony of red worms rooted inside large white
tubes. All around, white fish, brachyuran crabs, clams, small octopuses. I look,
credible and wary. Tremors. Falling ripple. A feeling of being swept away like a
grain of sand, a puny speck of dust amid mighty forces. I don’t know what it is I’m
seeing, am unable to imagine what I’m seeing. I repeat the several words pronounced
by Flash before the session: gig of great depth, black smoke-holes, white diffusers.
Zoarcidae, Serpulidae. Now I skirt a dusky wall, a wall of dangerous silence, solid as
skirt a wall of silence. Everything in me trembles.

At dinner, the feeling of double time was devastating. As though by collusion among
us, we were all dressed in black except Occident, who was wearing a turquoise jacket
and whose eyes that night betrayed unparalleled melancholy.

For several days, Irène had ceased to take part in the conversation, keeping her
visualizer’s orality for the lyrico-techno-numerical affinities she shared with Flash.
Occident was interrupting the men less and less often. For my part, I was locked in
a silence which, the further I sank into it, the more surely ruined all hope of
sociability in me. Thomas Lemieux did not like our silence. He saw in it a plot,
reproach, rejection, I don’t know which. With each sentence, he hinted at doors left
open. For us. He was extending his hand, constantly a line. And so he had barely
finished his soup this evening before throwing out, like a pair of dice in the middle of
the table: "Morality, lets talk about the morality of women." Five seconds, ten seconds
went by. Lemieux was watching for the slightest change in our faces. A sigh or frown
would have reassured him. Labour lost. Irène fiddled with her left earring. I kept
studying the colour of the wine in my glass. Occident was trying to catch her breath.
Lemieux looked at us, one after the other. Thoroughly disappointed, he said finally,
"But, Today. Since morality divides into as many individuals as it takes for society to
turn a profit, since a moralist is a busy lobbyist, since we launder evil the way the
Mafia launders its money, since morality is a respectable and media-wise currency, is
it still possible to be up in arms elsewhere than within one’s own four walls?" To
dream, be indifferent collectively. He was right. Nobody did it any more. There were
fads, certainly, causes that people rallied to out of curiosity. The gregarious instinct
was still intact. Each followed individually. But no crowd reaction, true enough.

I must have looked pensive. Not knowing whether he had touched a nerve, Lemieux spoke
directly to me. "Yes, I know, Cyril, you take me for a crank. A doctor has a soft
of it, a broad back too. He took a vow not to close his eyes to pain; his knowledge of
the body, man and death is a lucrative investment. I know all your little
writer’s clichés."

He composed himself. "Nevertheless, it’s a simple question. I’m asking you if you
think women can still be collectively indignant over their misfortune." Misfortune, he
had said misfortune as if it were a matter of choice, a piece of bad luck. He
continued, now making himself positively officious. "Should we make a connection
between women’s morality and the ‘business’ of hope?" He glared at us, ignoring
Carlos Loic Nadeau’s expression of annoyance and Padre Sinocchio’s fit of agitation.
"Business of hope" was his term for the recent phenomenon wherein a person, usually
a woman, stricken by, say, the violent death of a daughter, must rebuild a life through
petitions, press conferences and public soul-baring. "Mind you," he continued, "all that
is explainable since without collective anger it’s each for oneself with one’s lawyers
and the media, for whom personal disaster tastes of profit. Yes, ladies, you have won:
private lives are henceforth the stuff of politics."

When I went back to my cabin at night, I was overcome by an irresistible desire for
details. A hidden disorder ruled my thoughts, forcing me to alternate reality, a dream
state, and the other, so-called virtual reality which from now on was part of each one’s
perception of reality. I had begun to dream again as I had the previous year after
receiving Occident’s early letters. States of mind, of dream, lucidity and laissez-
bellyache followed one after another at a rate that demanded its own luxuriance of
details and recurrent motifs. Too much information. Too much feeling. Here, I
suppressed reality for the benefit of fiction. There, at the far side of a dream state, I
restored reality. Elsewhere, I had eyes only for elsewhere, wherein all could be
recomposed figuratively. Not one moment of respite. Thousands of images offered
themselves, virtual liaisons between the world and an increasingly uneasy me, a me
hunting on in obedience to I know not what insatiable need to grasp everything.

I reread my manuscript. I redefined the buildings in the armed city, which soon had
the earmarks of a fancy city. I described at length the reflection of palm trees in
the bumphers of limousines and in the tinted spectacle of passersby. I added details to
a point where they cast a wan, grey light of day in which I found myself sitting on the
damp grass in a big park with a book in my hand.

Hyde Park. People are making traffic around me. A pants cuff, the muscular calves
of a woman jogging, a child on a tricycle. Since I’m reading, I underlined a word or
sentence now and then, and Cumberland Gate, a woman dressed in a red slicker marches
resolutely toward Speaker’s Corner, disappears from my field of vision, reappears, a
small suitcase in her hand. She walks proudly, almost straight for me, one might say.
She stops, puts her suitcase down, opens it and takes out a small wooden stool which
she unfolds with a resounding snap. Immediately, three tourists gather round, curious
to hear her begin speaking.

My life is all about life. Language is alive in my throat. Can you hear the vibrations?
My voice has been severely damaged by a dream. I used to dream among dreamers.
The dreamers have left. I am now left by myself to listen to my broken voice. Every
day, I wake up early to hear the sound of the city. ‘Dear, dear! How queer everything
is today! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I’ve changed in the
summer, we were all dressed in black except Occident, who was wearing a turquoise jacket
and whose eyes that night betrayed unparalleled melancholy.

My mother was French, you know, my father English. Every day he used to read his
Anglo-Saxon philoficers whom my mother kept denigrating, holding up the genius of
her own thinking ancestors in comparison. Revolted at the thought that women could
forever be relegated to ignorance and insignificance, my father took to choosing the
books I read. When I was fifteen he made me read Essays on Truth and Idea as if
wishing to thrust me into the arms of the Absolute or have me forevermore wedged
between What and That. I understood none of it, of course. The more so since at this
time French and English words were beginning to sow terrible confusion in me. Slave, pain, habit, bite, pour, sale, poise, rot - every day the list grew longer - bride, feu, fine, plumet, roman, chat, femme, fond, mine, chair. Helpless halfway between English and French, I believed I was forevermore marooned in ambivalence. Then, with the years, words took flight and I became a dreamer. What about you? Do you dream?” she said as she backed away with the rain trickling down her slicker in little grey runnels, and added, “However, she soon made out that she was in the pool of tears which had wept when she was nine feet high.”

The image of the Hyde Park woman persisted. I awoke chewing over those words by Lewis Carroll. Rain was drumming on the glass of the porthole. It was going to be a beastly day. I was becoming increasingly discouraged. Never would I be able to weave French and English words into a collaboration to enable us to portray the sea in its original flavour. There was too much solitude on this boat. Too many different species, both specialized in the extreme. We were on assignment. It was going to take much more than the idea of a collaboration to enable us to portray the sea in its original flavour. There was too much solitude on this boat.

I settled into my "range of vision" only to be assailed by images, each more revolting than the last. Life. Life in all its forms of reproduction. A succession of close-ups of eggs, larvae, fins, sperm flows, embryos, baccal shelter, peduncles, polyps. Asexual creatures - “Plankton,” Pascal said, “means literally ‘that which is born to wander’” - and others, sexual, strutted and embraced, viscous, red and obscene, gelatinous blobs caught up in genetic frenzy. In monsters big and small, LIFE bubbled over. Feed, prance, prey and puff up with pride. Come let me bugger you in the nexus of the plexus. Enough to raise one’s taedium vitae à la Cioran or whatever. Viscous life in the living. Morula, blastula. Live creatures raising sea-floor ooze with a flip of the tail as they fell. It was not a pretty sight. Spectacular, though, these thousands of organs warding off the shades with their genders well in order.

The day was long. Full of disagreements over manoeuvres. After the evening meal, I went up to walk on deck. Sky of ink, total night. I went down to the library. Switched on the light. The fluorescent tubes flickered like cities at twilight. Soon a harsh light bathed the bookshelves and table. A smell of dust. It seemed to me as though thousands of years had passed since last week, as though time, having caused our heats to beat and found a use for our thinking nature, had buried its pirouette and shadow here amid the paper. Occident had perhaps been right to make us examine our intentions in this place, because throughout our five days here, reaching now for a book, now for an illustration, Iene and I had felt mightily drawn to elsewhere; a taste for the future in us, amplified by being aware we were not yet there. From the few moments of intimacy shared with Irene, there remained the beginnings of a curious well-being, a sharing of the time when we had come close to being close. Now, we must compose with the troubling present of the Symbol.

Footnotes:
1. Abba Rock Group
2. Lewis Carroll
3. Lewis Carroll
CATCHING THE SPIRIT
Solstice 1997/Interview with:
Lynda Baird & Ron Baird
by Carole Turner & Karl Jirgens

Ron & Linda Baird’s sculptures are as varied as they are inventive. Sometimes working independently and sometimes collaboratively, the Bairds have generated a dizzying array of works that define the term “innovation” in sculpture. Lynda Baird is a specialist in industrial design, fibre art and print-making and has been collaborating with Ron since 1985. Ron Baird has been a member of RCA (Royal Academy of Arts) since 1972, is a recipient of the Royal Architectural Institute Medal for Sculpture, founding director of the Latcham Public Art Gallery. A major survey of his first 20 years of work was organized by the Robert McLaughlin Gallery in 1984. Many of the sculptures have double articulations in their joints permitting movement along two axes, and have kinetic and acoustic qualities. Other works respond to changes in the weather, wind, light and rain. Some include electronic and computer components that generate sound when touched. Some are “viewer kinetic” and depend upon the movement of the observer to generate moving images and moiré-like patterns reminiscent of Vasarely. The Bairds have created works that have organic forms, and like ancient sculptures, are sometimes based on religious or mythological figures. A number of their works such as the “Children’s Magic Garden of Health” (Credit Lulu (a cross-dressing trapeze artist), and other colourful members of Farini’s ancestors. Not long ago a book was published on Farini, and recently a play was produced on his life. Baird’s prints depict Farini himself, the lovely and inimitable Lulu (a cross-dressing trapeze artist), and other colourful members of Farini’s acrobatic troupes. The Bairds’ sculptures have been exhibited widely, including their own farm property north of Toronto, as well as in California (Mt. Madonna Centre, Watsonville), Montréal (Expo 67), New York (Shell’s Garden, Manhattan), Ottawa (National Gallery), North York (Mel Lastman Square Entrance Gateway), Toronto (Spadina Subway entrance), Sudbury (Science North), Vancouver (Expo 86), and Yellowknife (Legislative Assembly). A Baird sculpture (“Spirit Catcher”) is featured on the cover of this issue of Rampike (see: interview, p. 19, for further details). The Bairds graciously agreed to an interview with Rampike on the Summer Solstice of 1997.

LB: There was a real intimacy, and it worked really well for that play. Although I don’t know how it would work for different plays. We did the costumes too. “The Secret Garden” was written by an English Lady.

CT: Yes, I believe it was Frances Hodgson Burnett.

RB: Right! This summer solstice they’re doing a piece in Ottawa, and Schafer is involved in it, there’s performance, music and everything. It’s called “The Garden.”

LB: You come and they give you seeds, and there’s a pageant and there’s music all around you, and you plant some seeds in a certain pattern, in a particular place with a certain group of people, it’s a whole day event.

RB: Nobody knows where the seeds are going to go. It’s up to the audience.

LB: I’m not sure what the choreography is, but that’s some of what’s involved.

RB: It gets out of control when you ask the common people what they think!

LB: (Laughs). It depends on who it is, I guess.

KJ: I suppose theatre can become just another inter-active form of sculpture if you want to think of it that way. A performance piece.

LB: You don’t know quite where dance leaves off, music starts and sculpture begins.

KJ: What was in the pouches?

LB: Oh, whatever their treasures were.

RB: Sometimes they didn’t even tell us.

LB: Stones, or,

RB: Hate mail… (laughs). Robert Daigneault the Canadian composer wrote some music for the piece, and that’s kind of interesting. He recorded sounds of working in the studio. At the time, the studio I worked in was this huge factory, that made mining equipment, so he recorded the noises from the machines and things, and then blended them together.

KJ: So, speaking about theatre, there was a play about the Great Farini, wasn’t there?

LB & RB: Oh, yes!

RB: That was the inspiration for the whole series of Farini dry-points [prints].

LB: Our daughter came home one day and said that she saw a poster that said there was going to be a play about “The Great Farini,” so we quickly drove back to Port Perry and got the information off the poster and called the theatre group and they were opening it that very night, so we went to it. What a place! It’s the Fourth Line...
Theatre, if you get a chance, go! It's enchanting; everything they do is about a local character. The guy that wrote the book, wrote the play too. And for the lead, the high-wire artist, they got one of the guys from Cirque du Soleil, and he was fabulous! And it’s in this barnyard setting, and they use the barn, and the roof-level of the barn as a second stage, it has bleachers all around, and hay bales, and there isn’t any professional lighting, or sound, it’s all done in the daylight and it’s done with acoustic instruments.

RB: It’s just astonishing, it’s so civilised, you go in, you buy your ticket, then you buy your beer, and then you go sit in the bleachers that are set up in this barn, and the play just sort of comes up on you, without you even noticing, there were kids fighting underneath the bleachers, and they’re rolling around in the dirt and punching each other out, and you don’t realize that it’s part of the play, or somebody is playing an accordsion up in the corner, sounds like they’re practising for something...

LB: Yes, the accordion player is sitting in with the audience...

RB: And before you know it, you’re right in this thing, it just transported us.

LB: And they use all kinds of local people and kids, everybody, and they have a number of really good professionals, and then they draw a lot from outside.

RB: But, when they needed a red-neck, some farmer would come out looking like he had chicken-wire pressed into the back of his neck, you know, and he just wore his regular clothes, and was absolutely perfect! It was cast beautifully.

LB: And the kids from the local gymnastics class would do a bit because this was "The Great Farini" so they got to do their walkovers and their cartwheels, it was great.

KJ: "The Great Farini" also known as William Hunt, was your ancestor.

LB: He’s my great-great uncle.

KJ: So, you’ve done this print series on "The Great Farini" partly inspired by this play which, in turn, was inspired by your predecessor. Amazing how things go around.

LB: My dad met him [The Great Farini/William Hunt] when he was a little boy, when his uncle [Hunt] came over to his house one day, with his wife who was "Madam Anna" and she really was a "Madam" (i.e.; Dame), her aristocracy was of Austrian origins. She played the piano very beautifully. My dad remembers her playing piano in their house at Northcliffe and St. Clair.

RB: Her [piano] teacher was Franz Liszt, she had one of his cigar butts, and that was auctioned off in Port Hope, when the Farini estate was sold. You know if "The Great Farini" was American, or British or French instead of Canadian, he would be a culture hero, like Daniel Boone, or Robespierre, or something. It’s such an astonishing story.

But we’re slightly embarrassed by the exhibitionism because we’re Canadians.

KJ: He did some amazing things! Didn’t he do stuff like shave himself, make ham and eggs and do his laundry while walking a tightrope across Niagara Falls?

LB: Yeah, stuff like that. You know, we have a lot of cultural heroes like that who just remain in the background.

CT: Because Canadians don’t want to acknowledge their own cultural icons the way that the Americans or Brits do. We have Grey Owl (Archie Belaney), Emily Carr has only recently been re-discovered, and there’s Ernest Thompson Seton who actually started the Boy Scout movement, but Lord Baden Powell took the idea from him and made it into a whole military thing, which Thompson never wanted. We have all kinds of interesting figures that people don’t know much about.

RB: Why do you think that is?

LB: Not enough people, don’t you think?

CT: Yes, we have a pretty small population base compared to other countries. And this sort of cultural awareness really began to grow after the Second World War, but the more recent generations of Canadians don’t seem as interested in the accomplishments of the earlier generations of immigrants who came to Canada. Too many people seem to be interested in using Canada as a cash register and are not all that interested in a passionate way, in Canada as a country.

LB: I think that’s probably why it’s changing, why these people are being researched. The fantasy is added in, the romanticism.

KJ: So, then the legends of the past starts to form the myths of today. Quite a few of your works are connected to history. There is an interesting history behind the site that the "Spirit Catcher" was erected on. And your bell-tower sculpture is integral to the community it was placed in. That was built in the same place where the fire-tower burned down, and so it’s both a historical and artistic statement. That was quite a story. Can you say a little more about the history behind that one?

RB: One time after a fire, the firemen hung up their hoses in this fireball bell-tower to dry. Usually, in the morning, the hoses would be dry and ready to be coiled up for use again. But this one time, some of the canvas on the outside of a couple of the hoses was still smouldering from the fire, and as the hoses were drying the smouldering spread until first, the fire tower, and then, the whole block caught on fire.

KJ: That’s an amazing story. And so your sculpture which is reminiscent of the old fire-tower was placed on that site as a kind of commemoration, and at the same time as an allusion to an historical event.

LB: Yes, Interestingly enough, David Milne (noted Canadian artist) had a studio right across the street from where all this happened. And he painted all that block after it was rebuilt following the fire. One of his works is a street-scene of Uxbridge from his studio window. It’s published in one of his [Milne’s] books.

RB: I can remember an essay back in the 1950’s written by Hugh MacLennan about this history thing, and his thesis was that Canada was basically settled by people who were defeated. They were either French whose country had abandoned them, or, they were Irish serfs who ended up here, or Americans who were running away because of their political views and because they lost the war [United Empire Loyalists]. They supported the wrong side and had to escape to Canada to seek protection, and so, as a defeated people, we’ve learned that, in order to do what we want to do, we had to be not noticed, and so we went around dressing like sparrows, and keeping our mouths shut and our heads down, and doing our thing, and actually from that attitude, sprang, I think, a very deep and powerful character, that’s very different from, say, what you get in Quebec right now, where their art is extravagant, and wonderful, and bright and showy, and totally inappropriate in Rosedale [a conservative suburb of Toronto]!

LB: Why were they defeated? What was so defeated about them?

RB: The French in Canada were abandoned by their mother country, the United Empire Loyalists were refugees from the States, and the Irish settlers were fleeing starvation and religious persecution and so on.

LB: I don’t think of them as defeated. I think there’s a flaw in that theory. I don’t buy it. I think that the United Empire Loyalists, for example, were people who felt all right with what was happening in Britain, and that they did want some change, but not in a revolutionary way, so I don’t think of them as defeated.

RB: OK, maybe not "defeated." That’s semantics. But what about William Lyon Mackenzie [elected as first mayor of Toronto in 1834, defeated at polls in 1836, and led rebellion of 1837 against Tory government]?

RB: We’re going to go and kick the government in the ass, and Mathews was put out his ploughing his field when William Lyon Mackenzie came by with all the rabble and protesters, and Mackenzie said, we’re going to go and kick the government in the ass, and Mathews joined in, left his plough in the middle of the field, and they got whacked when their protest rally got to York [now Toronto], and Mathews was arrested and put into jail with his friend, and there he stayed for around nine months, charged with anarchy or whatever. Then, he was sentenced to death. Now, there was an appeal pending, word came that the ship had arrived from England, and that it had landed in Kingston. The spring would have brought the Queen’s signature that gave these guys dispensation from their supposed “crime,” and as soon as the local government heard that this ship was in Kingston, in order not to risk the release of this innocent farmer, they hung him, right away, in Courthouse Square in York [Toronto].

LB: That’s true. It was harsh, but going back to the original concept, I still don’t think of Canadians as being defeated. Maybe the French felt neglected by their mother country, and they certainly felt over-powered by the English, and they were, and because of money, control was exerted from England Canadian. But, I think that there were a lot of British noblemen, for example, sent out to the colonies, who had a lot of control over things until people like MacKenzie started to rebel, and that nature welled up in our history more and more so, to the point where people have said that we do have an identity, and we do have a complete separation from England, and we’re not British, so I don’t think of that from a defeated standpoint. It’s just not so revolutionary as the Americans.

"Spiral of Sharing" (Stainless Steel & Anodized Aluminum – 13 m high x 2 m diameter). This sculpture is a "donor recognition" commission. It is based on the structure of DNA. The double helix hangs in an open glass three story stairwell and is made of stainless plate and tubing with 936 anodized aluminum name plaques honouring the founding donors. It is motorized and slowly revolves. (Client: Markham Stouffville Hospital Foundation).
KJ: Somewhat along these lines, some of your work is aimed toward people who have some dis-ability, you’ve done works for either hospitals, or for places of therapy such as the “Children’s Magic Garden of Health” (Credit Valley Hospital), and I note that much of that work is also inter-active, so, there is a dimension of healing that comes into the works. Is that just a co-incidence or did you plan for these sorts of works?

RB: It’s really driven by economics. It’s very strange.

LB: A lot of institutions for people who are incapacitated somehow, either temporarily or long-term, seem to have the funding for these kinds of projects. But we also really have become specialists in the donor-recognition area, and it’s been good because there’s a lot of public art available in the public milieu, and it’s been “rough times,” budgets have been cut back dramatically, so this is a new market for public art. That’s been very, very good, although we also like to do sculpture that doesn’t contain names -- that’s one kind of thing. I like sculpture that’s for its own sake. Every piece that is a public sculpture has some sort of ceremony about it, a reason for its being there, for the enjoyment of a particular group of people, so, you really have an obligation to the public when you do public art, that you don’t have when you do personal or private work.

RB: In regard to the idea of putting names on art... when I was in England, and I visited Westminster Abbey, they had all those stone sarcophagi, with the knights laid out in white marble, and the first thing that I saw was that people had scratched their initials into these old marble figures, and they’ve been doing it for six or seven hundred years! And suddenly the graffiti on these sculptures became more interesting than the sculptures themselves. You know, you’d read “Jake, 1746” and say “Wow!” So, I began to think of names as a sort of texture, as a really fascinating texture.

CT: And it’s all based on graffiti! (laughter)

LB: Have you seen the Vietnam recognition memorial? Isn’t that amazing, that feeling! The entering, and the slope down, and the geometry, everything is just really wonderful, and you’re really involved, because you’re in it.

KJ: Well, the thing about graffiti is that it is inter-active, the individual wants to participate with something that is in the public eye, a building, a subway-car, a sculpture maybe. On a variety of other levels, I notice that your work is based on this idea of inter-activity, for example, that giant electronic musical organ at the Battle Centre, the fact that the keys are coloured and large, makes them inviting to the touch. It isn’t long before the audience begins to touch them. And then they discover that each of the keys keeps changing the sounds it generates each time they touch it, and that invites further exploration, because you want to know what will be the next sound caused by touching a particular key, and you participate with the work, and, in a way integrate with, or become part of the sculpture. And this work was created for a group of developmentally challenged people. It seems to me that takes sculpture into a different kind of area when compared to more conventional work which is there generally for the eyes only. Your works are made to be touched, and actually respond, and are synaesthesis in that they interact with and respond to so many of the senses.

"Sarnia Civic Showplace Fountain." (Brushed stainless steel with ABS tubing -- 22.5 m long and 2.5 m wide and 3.2 m high). The fountain is a forest of stainless steel tubes, standing in a rushing river. The water is pumped from the St. Clair river and splashed back through the rocks. The individual tubes have been colorized at varying heights in order to create the illusion of swimming fish. In this "viewer kinetic" piece, the fish appear to flicker and move as the observer passes by. (Client: City of Sarnia with the MacPherson Foundation, Nak Design Group. The fountain was funded by the MacPherson Family as a memorial to their father).

RB: See, when you create something like this, you can’t anticipate the way people will use it. The very first people, un tutored that is, who came up to that organ project, tested it out with their hands, and then their elbows, and then their noses, and within two minutes, they were rolling across the keyboards, and using their faces -- it was something I never anticipated, I had to play an instrument in this way.

LB: And so, it takes away a lot of inhibitions about music, and it also allows a real physical contact, really direct, and because of the way the piece responds, it’s almost like it shows you what’s going on in the room; it’s showing you what’s happening.

KJ: Do you think this inter-activity is one of the reasons you are so interested in kinetic or kinetic-acoustic sculpture? I am thinking also of "viewer kinetic" pieces such as the one you did for the Sarnia Civic showplace where people have to walk by the piece in order to generate a moving image of fish apparently swimming by. So, do you think you create these sorts of works because you are interested in the direct involvement of the audience?

LB: Yes, with the Sarnia piece it helps if you don’t just stand there, you have to move by, get physically involved on a whole sensory level. I think the more senses involved, the more interesting it is.

RB: I think what every artist strives for is to create a sense of wonder, if it’s not there, then it’s just a subway ad or something.

LB: It has to be fun. The playfulness part is really healing.

KJ: I guess that “Spirit Catcher” piece you did involves a sort of engagement. Interestingly, in regard to the idea of playfulness, for native people, laughter is a type of healing.

RB: Well, they had the last laugh when we installed that piece. During the opening ceremonies the man who was president of the foundation was brought up in a Catholic school by Jesuit priests, and he invited the head Jesuit of this seminary to come and bless this project during the opening ceremonies, and he stood up and said, "Would everyone here," and there was a whole plaza of people, all of downtown Barrie was there, "would everybody please rise and bow their heads at respect to our Lord, our God." And everybody did, and he prayed. And after he was finished, an Indian chief from the Rama reserve strode up in his jeans and T-shirt, and demanded to have equal time, and Ram was unannounced. He came with a band, and a big medicine drum. He got them drunk, and ended up with all the furs. So the elders of the tribe, put a curse upon the trading post, and subsequently all the natives were afraid to go near the place because it had that curse on it. The result of it was, the trader stayed by himself all winter long, with no one there, and got sick and died. They sent his replacement in the next year, and he came back after a few weeks, after he having discovered that this post was absolutely useless, and some time later the site burned down and that was it. The rumour that was flying around concerning the founding of Barrie, is that every business that was down in that waterfront area, failed within a short time of its inauguration, and the rumour was, that it was because this old Indian curse was still hanging on any businesses in the area. So, when this humungous Thunderbird sculpture came from the west coast and landed on this exact spot, the Indians took it as some sort of a sign that, OK, this was a retribution, and came down to take the curse away, and that sculpture has been very strange in that the town maintenance people complain that they’re always having to go remove candles and incense and offerings and stuff from around the base. People get married there. One lady told me that she goes there to talk to her husband. Every three weeks she goes, makes a trip from some place else. Her husband’s been dead for six years, but she goes there, its like a cosmic phone-booth. And on earth day a chain of five hundred people formed a circle around it.

KJ: I noticed that you have a lot of organic forms in your sculpture, sometimes there are plant-like or flower-like shapes.

RB: Interesting that you should mention that, because the piece that I’m working on right now, is for David Tomlinson who is the retired chief gardner at Kew [England]. And I’m making him a flower that is a thousand-petalled lotus, it’s all made out of shovels, and its kinetic, it turns in the wind. Actually, its been whizzing around like a Cuisinart. We’ve been making jokes about David using it as a manure spreader. And I’m making him a flower that is a thousand-petalled lotus, it’s all made out of shovels, and its kinetic, it turns in the wind. Actually, its been whizzing around like a Cuisinart. We’ve been making jokes about David using it as a manure spreader.

LB: And the Chief stepped up to the microphone and said, “Would everyone please rise out of respect to our God while I say a few words.” And everybody just loved it, except for the Jesuit priest. The story: The Chief told was astounding, that the actual site of the sculpture had been the site of a Hudson’s Bay post a long, long time ago. At the very top of Kempenfelt Bay was what was called the 9 mile portage, which goes over and allows access into Georgian Bay, so, you could skip into the Great Lakes if you could get past them, which is a perfect place strategically located a post because all the traffic was going through. The first trader from Hudson’s Bay cheated the Indians. He got them drunk, and ended up with all the furs. So the elders of the tribe, put a curse upon the trading post, and subsequently all the natives were afraid to go near the place because it had that curse on it. The result of it was, the trader stayed by himself all winter long, with no one there, and got sick and died. They sent his replacement in the next year, and he came back after a few weeks, after he having discovered that this post was absolutely useless, and some time later the site burned down and that was it. The rumour that was flying around concerning the founding of Barrie, is that every business that was down in that waterfront area, failed within a short time of its inauguration, and the rumour was, that it was because this old Indian curse was still hanging on any businesses in the area. So, when this humungous Thunderbird sculpture came from the west coast and landed on this exact spot, the Indians took it as some sort of a sign that, OK, this was a retribution, and came down to take the curse away, and that sculpture has been very strange in that the town maintenance people complain that they’re always having to go remove candles and incense and offerings and stuff from around the base. People get married there. One lady told me that she goes there to talk to her husband. Every three weeks she goes, makes a trip from some place else. Her husband’s been dead for six years, but she goes there, its like a cosmic phone-booth. And on earth day a chain of five hundred people formed a circle around it.

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KJ: So tell me more about this Garden at Kew.

RB: This garden is divided into “rooms” which are separated by great ceder hedges, each with its own experience. So you go from one part to another. There’s one that is a kind of woodland place or a water place, and then he has one that’s just a garden of smells. A “scent garden.” It’s a total olfacitory thing. And he said that the best way to experience this garden is in the middle of the night.

LB: So you move from smell to smell.

RB: And as you’re walking, your feet are crushing thinve and herbs and things.

LB: It’s round in shape, and there is a pathway through it, and the centre is very fine thyme, not a blade of grass and each time you step, these fragrances rise up from the ground. And then the edges are all very English, very wild, but controllably wild. Each
The combination of your sculpture and this garden sounds like a blend of the ancient and the new, which almost gives it a kind of timeless, or mythological quality. It seems to me that you use a lot of mythological imagery in your sculptures at times, sea-monsters, dragons and gargoyles and so on. Where does that come from?

RB: I don't know. They're just forms and shapes that I like. I think that with sculpture, people like it, even if it's abstract, because of its anthropomorphic qualities. I remember back in the 1960's, we were fiddling around and we had glass slides, and we put coloured inks and bromo-seltzer and water and whatever else and sandwiched it between these two glass slides and then pop it into the slide projector, and then watch as the different chemicals and whatever started to interact with each other.

KJ: A light show! I remember seeing one of those images on the cover of a Janis Joplin album, among other places. Those light shows were pretty popular for a while.

RB: I don't know why! (laughter). But, people would look at these abstract structures unfolding and they'd say, "Oh, now that looks like my aunt, who looks like a rutabaga, or, there's a dragon in there, or whatever." People were doing a sort of Rorschach thing, but they couldn't help it. But one thing they weren't doing was looking at those things as just abstract patterns, and appreciating them just for that. I've even noticed that with music. When I listen to music, it makes images for me if it's really good music. It's like going to the movies for me to listen to Bach or something.

KJ: You've also moved into some interesting areas using unusual materials. You recently did a giant iridescent butterfly sculpture using a specially treated metal.

RB: It's a special oxidized metal. We had to boil it in acid and the sheet is hooked up to these resistors that measure the electrical resistance of the sheet, and as that changes, it indicates the thickness of the oxide that's forming on the stainless steel. I mean we're talking molecular thicknesses here, and so the iridescent colour happens because the lights reflected off the mirrored finish of the stainless steel and also off the oxide surface, and all these colours happen depending on the thickness of the oxide. And what we do is, when the colour begins to form, we raise the sheets back out of the boiling acid, so that the bottom of the sheet stays in longer than the top, and I'd like to say we got the spectrum, but we didn't because things happen in there that we couldn't anticipate, and we'd start to get octaves of colour and bands of colour would repeat.

LB: There's a certain action of being just above the acid, and what comes off it, and the further up it gets, the less that's affecting it. So, you get a gradual effect as you raise the metal. And we tried it twice, and the second time we didn't get at all what we got the first time, even though we did the same thing.

KJ: So you're not only inventing new things to see, but new ways of seeing.

LB: Playing with technology is what we do.

KJ: Well, with pieces like your wire works or the Samia piece, it is almost post-Einsteinian in concept, because what you see is relative to the position of the observer. I guess you could call this work "post-modern" for lack of a better term.

RB: In anything but cooking the term is OK. Can you imagine post-modernist wines? Actually, now that I think about it, I might have had some at a wedding reception.

KJ: What about your influences? With the double helix forms and moire patterns and so on, I think back to somebody like Victor Vasarely. Did you have anybody early in your career that got you thinking in particular ways?

RB: I think that I've always been interested in science. Actually, now I subscribe to more science magazines than I do to art magazines. And, so I guess I've always been interested in visual phenomena. What about you Lynda?

LB: Well, it's a really interesting thing, because what you're doing depends on who you've been dealing with in the last while. I mean, if you're dealing with a film crew, or you've made videos or worked with musicians, different things happen. So, it's a pretty organic kind of interest trail. At the time, a kind of a discipline of certain materials emerges. We keep a wide-open view of the whole industry, and technology, and how advances allow you to do some different things. There are some things happening in surfaces, like paint surfaces, that are incredible; sprays that are coming close to gold-leafing, and ways of using finishing. I mean there are all kinds of glues out there that weren't there a few years ago, so now you can glue stuff where you used to have to fix it up differently.

RB: We always joke about how whenever we are asked to do a commission, we end up doing whatever we're thinking about at the time.

KJ: That makes sense. And yes, I've heard you can actually glue airplanes together now. They've got these super-glues that are so strong.

RB: They do. We've used them. We get them from a company that makes them for outdoor signs, which aren't welded together anymore, you know those big signs, and they can glue the signs on the sides of trucks.

LB: In anything but cooking the term is OK. Can you imagine post-modernist wines?

RB: Yes. I guess you really have to be on your toes with technology these days.

LB: Well, it's true. It's changing so fast. In the old days you could learn your craft and nowadays, even with something as simple as joining metal. For years and years, a blacksmith knew how to do it with a little borax and some charcoal, but now, in the past few years, we've seen plasma jet cutters, water jet cutters, computer controlled wire cutters, nibblers, all these new things.

LB: They now have welders that weld aluminum foil together!

RB: I've seen razor blades welded together! (laughter). Nice weld too!

CT & KJ: Wow!

"Military Tower Structure" (Painted Steel and Mirror Polished Stainless Steel -- 20 m high). The reflective mirror finished stainless steel panels rock in the wind and create light patterns on the roof of the nearby museum. The panels also rotate as the wind vane and the antennae at the top sway with the wind. This piece symbolizes communications technology. (Client: Canadian Forces Communications & Electronic Museum, CFB Kingston. Sears & Russell Architects, and Dunlop Farrow Inc. Architects).

Untitled sculpture on site at the Baird's farm. (Corten steel -- approx. 7 m high x 3 m wide). Double articulation permits the "paddles" and "sails" on this boat-like sculpture to respond to the wind. The entire structure pivots on a central axis and thereby responds to changes in wind direction as a weather vane.
Oh she said I am winter through and through. True North through the frigid spine of me blue ice and pine.

Then running south only to find my heart's own twin all caged in thorn my red-gold summer needled heart's the winter one, transplanted oh, she said
GARGOYLES IN PERFORMANCE
Interview with David Fennario by Karl Jirgens

David Fennario is a celebrated and controversial playwright who has lived most of his life in the Pointe-Saint-Charles district of Montreal. His plays include On the Job (1976), Nothing to Lose (1977), and the renowned Balconville (1980), which won the Chalmers Award. Fennario's characters often use vociferous dialogue to attack existing social conditions within a decaying political-economic system. In May of 1997, Fennario participated in the "Far Side of Comedy: Humour and Sainie in Theatre" Conference at Algoma University in Sault Ste. Marie. At that time, he presented his new one-man play Gargoyles. Gargoyles is an innovative work that incorporates the local history of Montreal into a kind of "walking tour" that is either performed live by Fennario on the streets of the city, or presented with the accompaniment of slides to create the impression of a "tour" when presented outside of Montreal. It could be argued that Fennario's method and approach to theatre, combines art and politics in the tradition of predecessors such as Jean-Paul Sartre. During his visit to Sault Ste. Marie, David Fennario kindly agreed to this interview with Rampike in which he speaks about his craft and the socio-political views that inspire much of his writing.

KJ: You're obviously using satire in your writing. To what extent do you see your art or drama as serving a political or instructive function aimed at making social change? DF: It's been such a drive for me, to the point where I can't distinguish the two; sometimes I tend to forget that I'm an artist. That's been happening a lot lately for the last six or seven years. I've been out to, I don't know how many, demonstrations. Over the years, I became a radical, and my radicalization is what gave me the confidence and the motivation to an artist. So I became a radical before I became an artist. But in a way, the two happened together. I had to become politicized in order to be an artist because where I came from it was like, "Go get measured for a shovel," that's it, that's you, grade ten, you leave, you get a job, very blue collar. The whole tradition of it. I've said this quite often, it's become a cliché, but it's true. I remember going to a library when I was fourteen, I used to sneak into libraries because I was ashamed of reading, the whole status was on sports, we're talking real blue collar here, and I used to sneak to libraries, and I'd read, and a couple of my friends off the streets came in, and they looked at me and said, "What are you doing here?" So, I looked at them and said, "What are you doing here?" And they said, "We just broke a window and we figured the cops would never look for us in a library." So, it's nothing I've ever really been proud of, and as I get older, I realize it's something I've never fully grown comfortable with. In a part of me, I still feel it's pretentious to say I'm a writer. And coming out of that, I hesitate to call it culture, but in that community, people communicate by talking, by singing or dancing, you know, those are more the art forms of the working classes, and we were good at that. So, to this day, I think, I've kept my 800 word vocabulary when I speak, and the other language only comes out when I write, and I add about 5 or 6 new words to my spoken vocabulary every year, but only when I finally get comfortable with them. That way, I don't feel like somebody's going to say, "Will you listen to you? Who the fuck do you think you are?" (laughter). Because I still live there.

KJ: Your bi-lingual play Balconville dealt with Franco-Anglo relations with reference to both Québec and Canada. Do you think your view of these relations has changed much since the Québec referendum?

DF: I voted "Oui" in 1980, and I voted "Oui" in 1996. It hasn't changed much. I think that guys like Mordecai Richler are trying to portray me as a raving Quebec nationalist, not to mention the other Anglophones in that province. I wish they would go down too well. And it becomes a serious threat when it comes to someone like that, who, I assume, does not make moves like that casually. I mean how many options do you have? What's the problem with giving Québec (never mind distinct society status), the same status as Scotland or Wales? I mean Scotland and Wales are known the world around as nations. You know, they're not officially independent. What's the problem? And its an economic and political option for the Canadian ruling class, because it can be business as usual. There's nothing unusual about that sort of arrangement. I mean it's the solution to Bosnia. It's not like barbarism breaks out, and nationalism breaks out. It's something that the ruling classes over there decided to use, it's a card they played for power, and it's a card they'll play over here, because the deficit excuse is running out.

KJ: Speaking of partitioning, how do you think that the First Nations people figure into the equation in Québec?

DF: Well, where I stand on that, I support the Crois' right to self-determination, along with the Mohawk and the Québécois. And I think that the fact that they have, in some ways, been counted against each other, doesn't help the situation. I don't think that Elijah Harper necessarily did the Québec or Native People a favour by the stand he took. Or, I don't think that Mathew Coon-Come is doing anybody a favour by the stand he takes against Québec. It's like a criminalization of the whole people of Québec. It's like saying that somewhat Québécois, part of Canada, or that Québec is more anti-Indian than the rest of Canada. Give me a break. Look at the Canadian record of what's happened. Who sent in the army to Oka anyhow? That's not to say that there are any illusions about the Parti Québécois by any means, or the Francophone ruling class by any means, but this whole sort of thing is playing one against the other, as far as I can see. The Québec and Indian people have a lot more in common than they have differences. Canada was based on the oppression of the Québec and Indian people and they have that common oppression. I consider Québec to be an oppressed nation. And the threat of partitioning is an example of that. During Oka, the largest support that came out for the Mohawks in Canada, was Francophones in Montreal. They organized the big demonstrations that happened every night during the Oka crisis.

KJ: Balconville won a Chalmers Award and brought you quite a bit of success and notoriety, but not long after that success, you went on record saying that you were tired of the larger scale theatrical productions, and instead, you wanted to move to a smaller more community-based type of theatre. Does that still hold for you now?

DF: Well, basically, I hit the main stage or the big stage before I knew what the hell I was doing. And, it was an opportunity that arose. I had a book based on my journals, I was published, and the artistic director of one of the largest theatres in Quebec read the book and was very impressed, and asked me if I was interested in plays. Otherwise, I would have never got into theatre. There were no theatres anywhere around where I was coming from. And so, I got a grant to sit in for two seasons, and I wrote a play. All my plays are just like movies, it was the only form I was familiar with, the only one I knew. And the play I wrote turned out to be a hit. So, "boom," that's where I started, in 400 hundred seat theatres, rather than the usual way, which is from the church basement up. So, I didn't discover community theatre until my third year of success. That's when I realized that that was what I was more comfortable doing, because I could tie in my politics. It's been very rare, even now, when I've been able to tie in my politics with my theatre. You need a theatre that's got a political mandate for radical change in order to get a play that's going to work that way. You know you can do the most radical piece you want... I mean, they'll do Bertolt Brecht, he's a Marxist, he's a Leninist, and they do him just like an academic piece, it's just like they do Shakespeare, you know. Because the whole context of how it's done is just as important, and maybe more important, than the context of the play.
KJ: You used to work with the Black Rock theatre at Pointe Ste. Charles. Do you still work with them?

DF: The average life span of a community theatre group is a year. The Black Rock group was around for five years. It now functions basically as a woman’s group, which is interesting, and this woman’s group emerged out of the Black Rock group, and still keeps the Black Rock name on its résumé. I still work with some of the people I worked with back then.

KJ: Many of your plays are set in the Pointe Ste. Charles area. Obviously, that’s because of your own up-bringing and experience. How much of yourself or your personal experience would you say you put into your own writing or your drama?

DF: More in my earlier stuff than in the stuff I’ve been doing recently.

KJ: What sort of work have you been focusing on lately?

DF: I’ve been doing monologues lately. They’ve been getting produced broadly. And, I’m performing now. So, I’ve been doing monologue plays like that.

KJ: How would you say this fairly recent involvement in performance has affected you or your writing?

DF: Well, I talk to myself more (laugh). Because you do it a lot. I mean I’m doing monologues and they are about my life. For example, one of my first monologues was called “Banana Boots” and the basic plot line, the thing that I hung the whole thing on, was based on a trip I took to Belfast just about the time that Bobby Sands was starving to death. So, I do a lot of rehearsing and talking to myself. I do it on the street sometimes, I gotta watch it! (laugh). I start expressing the thoughts out loud.

KJ: There is a well-known comedian from the U.K., he has a working class background, grew up in a rough area and used to do stand-up comedy about his roots. And he used to wear these crazy boots that looked like bananas. I think he has his own TV comedy series now. Did he inspire you in any way?

DF: He was the guy! He was playing Belfast at the time. I don’t know where his politics are right now, but he was like Richard Prior before Richard Prior became Eddy Murphy, know what I mean? I can’t remember his name, he was just known as “Banana Boots” and he was a legend in Belfast. This madman was drawing a Catholic and Protestant audience at the same time, and people used to say, “Go see him, before somebody kills him,” (laugh). It was around 1980.

KJ: So, you’ve got this new one-act play, or I guess you could call it a monologue, called Gargoyles. Could you say a little bit about that?

DF: The thread is the history of the Anglophones of Montreal, the development of the city and province, and pretty much the creation of Canada. I contrast two communities. There’s Westmount and then there’s Pointe Ste. Charles. There’s a Westmount version and a Pointe Ste. Charles version in this history in regard to what to do, and how to fit in with the rest of Quebec and so on. And so, I go through all of that over a period of time, and I tie in my own personal stuff where and when it fits.

KJ: And you also use some slides in this production. Is this multi-media or intermedia approach something new for you, or have you used other media in combination with your theatrical works before?

DF: I’ve done this particular piece with and without slides. If you’re travelling, it’s a pain in the ass, the more technical it is. It’s in a way it’s better if you can get away with just telling it. One thing I’ve learned in drama, if anything, is that too much is worse than too little. So, if you have too much, then you’re actually distracting or taking away from what you’re saying. It may seem terrific or inventive, but it’s actually taking away from what you’re saying. So, it’s a technical thing, you’ve got to be more careful, and it can be expensive, everybody’s talking expense now, right? I mean, you’re travelling with one stage manager, and if your lucky, the director. Who is going to carry it? Who is going to put it on? (laugh). I would like to do “Banana Boots” and I talked to a director about this, if I could only stay in one place for (at least) four nights (laugh). So, I said I’d like to do it, but not with just seven or eight slides, but do it, really do it, turn it into a home movie. But otherwise, I don’t think it needs it. So, with the technology, it’s either really integrate it, or don’t do it at all. So, I haven’t really decided with Gargoyles yet. I’ve tried it with slides. I’d actually like to have more than I have. And, I’ve already done it without slides. For example, I’ll be doing it on camera in Montreal, and doing slides while they’re filming it is not going to work. So, what they’re going to do is film the photographs and integrate them with the film. The film is going to be done by Cathy Mullins who is originally from the Pointe, and the director is Alec MacLeod, who did a profile on me for the National Film Board recently, and he also did “Banana Boots”.

KJ: And where has Gargoyles played so far?

DF: I did a benefit in Toronto last year in August, but at the time I was still on script, and I’m doing it tomorrow for St. Columban House, a very good grass roots group at the Pointe, and I did the Centaur (theatre in Montreal). That’s it, so far.

KJ: It sounds like this one-person monologue thing is really working for you, because it’s light-weight, portable, and ties in with your political concerns, so that you can just go whenever you need or want to.

DF: And I find it’s moving me more into performing, too. I’m actually learning how to act. I was doing a lot of readings for a while. And it was Simon Malbohat who has directed all of the one-person plays so far, who said, I should try monologues, I should try performing them. And it certainly does come more in line with where I come from. I have a friend of mine, John Salmela, who was a great gymnast, he was champion of Quebec two years in a row. And he’s now a doctor of sports psychology, I call him “Doctor Jock.” Anyhow, he talked to a European coach once, and he asked him how they got their gymnasts. He was a famous coach, Bela Karoli, the one that trained Nadia, and the coach said that they would go around to working class schools, and he’d pick the kids who were jumping around the most, and he would train them to be gymnasts. So, I think that directors should do the same thing. They should go around to working class schools, and pick the kids that are acting up the most, and turn them into actors because, my argument is, that acting, basically, is more of a working-class art form. More so than middle-class, because a lot of acting is body, and if you’re working class, you’re much more likely to be loose in your body, to express yourself with your body, dancing, or singing, or a shovelling, or in sports. And if you’re middle class, they teach you how to behave properly, how to sit properly, how to eat properly; it stiffens you up. So, the irony is, that the majority of actors are middle class. They gotta pull the carrot out of their assholes. They spend ten years loosening up, so they can move properly. It’s not all just brain, believe me. Matter of fact, less brain than body. So, maybe I’m more comfortable that way. I’ve got a shoe in my mouth, but no carrot up my asshole (laugh).

KJ: So, is your recent experience with acting affecting your writing in any way?

DF: Hmm, oh boy. Yeah, it is. I’ve also been working on a number of books, that I’ve done various drafts on, and then just shelved them for the time being. And I now realize that every one of them could be made into a monologue, I think, because the basis of my talent as a writer comes from my story-telling. It flows together. Whenever I’ve tried to write fiction, it always sounded like a literary exercise to me. Whereas, I always felt more comfortable telling something that was coming from what I said, or what I heard.

KJ: Well, the immediacy of an audience can help contribute to the process as well.

DF: They’re terrific editors. If they don’t laugh, it’s not funny! (laughs). At least sixty percent of the show is the audience!

Note: Since Fennario’s appearance in Sault Ste. Marie, his one-person play Gargoyles has been presented in Westmount (Montreal), and filmed for television. The film was directed by Cathy Mullins and Alec MacLeod.

MANDALA

nelson mandela is sitting on a log
outside the entrance to a grimm forest
his elbows are on his knees and

nelson mandela is sitting amiably on a log
outside the entrance to a forest
thick as my unconscious

it seems he is whittling something out of a white wood
he rests his elbows on his knees and is looking down
deep in conversation with perhaps a small boy
a teenaged costa rican
a small chipmunk-sized animal that had appeared from behind the log

the camera pans down the path & into the forest
there are eleven-year olds running everywhere.
by a bend in the path there are five of them
--their pants half pulled down--
their hands moving frantically up and down
their thin white penises

i see myself close by
settling in to sleep on a mossy bank
i am very calm
probably thirteen-years old
i am aware of some kind of military formation
in the meadow beyond the woods
dressed in tan desert uniforms
one of them holding a flapping red flag

this is no day to die
this is no day to resolve anything

GOOD NEIGHBOURS MAKE GOOD FENCES

so i say to my neighbour
the small horse
its thumping hoofbeats becoming a scene from twelfth night
is perhaps a liftbridge somewhere in new england

the enemy continues drawing its little pictures:
a buffalo bursting into flame as our leader hits it with an arrow
the sound a wolf makes
discovering it isn't a dog

i've got my lawnmower, some gasoline and a match
but i'm not interested in symbols
in inch-high grass burning late in the afternoon

a cool breeze raises in from the lake
people with briefcases walk down our street
looking for symbols
men discover they're not wolves
hold paper matchbooks ominously
stand on the porch
trying to look like leaders

a buffalo bursts into flame
my copy of othello gets rained on

i lift my arms up
then down
make my mouth into
the shape of a small horse

after the fire
after i've dug for days
my lawn will look like the inside of a cave
the surface of the moon

i'll spend the summer drawing
pictures of new england
helping myself to
anything
from your fridge:
a beer or two
a small horse pickled in brine

ALL HAT & NO COWBOY

the horizon curves round me
a leathery shine

it's dark in here
in the distance i can barely make out

7 1/2 D
maybe a rattler over the rise
haven't seen the sun since
we began this ride

this is what it'll say on my grave:
rode out west one day
made it from ear to ear
if only his hat hadn't been so big

SOME OTHER FISH

the googly eyes of death
are under my arms
i can't take a shower

seem to have no place
to write my name

is that the telephone?
no it's a fish on the end of my hook
and i'm completely surrounded

i open the door to my mazda
sed then back up
it snaps off
caught on the little speaker
at the drive thru

there are gills on the sole of my left foot
i can breathe only every other step
unless i hop or else
drive
but only automatic

it's getting hot in here
i don't want to blink
in case i miss something:
my entire life, or
a cheese sandwich floating through
the crenelated air

can you hear that?
it's a little car
revving its motor on my shoulder
it's just travelled
up from my wrist
tells me
time to take a shower

there's a big eye at the top of the stall
if you say sad things
it begins to cry and
then you can shower

oh it's nice to be rid of this dirt
to live again
to have the right smell

MY SON LOOKS IN THE TOILET AT WHAT HE HAS MADE

a boy in his bed
a boy with his mother
2 brothers
someone climbing over the fence
a big fish, a little fish
a wall, a flat wall without doors
a TV
a whale, a shoe, a little ball
a hot dog, a hot dog, the rain
a cat curled up
an ed
my little telephone

goodbye
IN THREE SIZES

by Dick Higgins

Dick Higgins, world-renowned poet, theoretician and visual artist offers the following performance piece. He informs us that this piece is based on "ah well -- ah straw," a poem written in 1988. Higgins currently resides in Barrytown, New York.

*** *** ***

Three bourgeois women are seen, one very small, one medium size, and one enormous. They are dressed as identically as possible. A set, if there is to be one, should suggest country clubs and what a certain person calls "gracious living;" they have similar accents, but their actual voices need not be similar.

THE MIDDLE-SIZED ONE: Ah well -- ah straw!

THE BIGGEST ONE: To romp among aloes -- ah!

THE LITTLEST ONE: T'Hole? No, Erla!

THE MIDDLE-SIZED ONE: (confidentially, to the audience): That's Rita from Raba, sans her principles and her humps. (The Littlest One produces and begins to eat a huge doughnut.)

THE BIGGEST ONE: (archly to the Littlest One): Ah, Edo, where Captain Spier's colander was, as Padre Aril said to a few erose men -- ah, there he was rigid. The rent? He soaked them.

THE LITTLEST ONE: (to the Middle-sized One): Want a bite?

THE MIDDLE-SIZED ONE: that'd be me-too-ism unless El Cid took Inge with reckless abandon.

THE BIGGEST ONE: (pensively): Etui? Ah -- Etui. (Suddenly intense.) To be blasé in Erse -- dam!

THE MIDDLE-SIZED ONE: It's that eatin' sass.

THE LITTLEST ONE: You know, Oleg twists his swat.

THE MIDDLE-SIZED ONE: Warped like a sperm we redo it, and Elia from Paree -- imbibing Kloster Etaler, she's got lots of "I don't's."

THE BIGGEST ONE: Ah -- please cure me of the leather stocking purées!

THE LITTLEST ONE: Ah -- to oil the straps! Here's a side bet.

THE MIDDLE-SIZED ONE: That's Amos!

THE LITTLEST ONE: That's slaw! And Robert has the cream of Sati.

THE BIGGEST ONE: (pensive again) : Ah -- Alai oinks. For it? I is as is, in my sweet cell unbent.

THE MIDDLE-SIZED ONE: (To the Biggest One): Ah, Ida! This is a range of responsibleness that is oral for a doggy. (Points her hand like a pistol at the Biggest One): Now draw!

THE BIGGEST ONE: (producing a real pistol): Mine emits! (Shoots the Middle-sized One, who collapses). And Ossa?

THE LITTLEST ONE: I am passé, and he redes.

THE MIDDLE-SIZED ONE: Ah the nest! Ah! (Dies. The curtain, if there is one, or at least the lighting falls or fades slowly.)

Betweenenity

by Karen Mac Cormack

redirection's test a sense of steam rehearsing rainfall
clip the wings -- feathers still fly
this comfort zone comes with change.
altitude to attitude intact
(that's zipper)
gravel reaches us as sand
and what's underfoot means pay attention
as years of turbulence or
asymmetry's sky moving to the left
erase the line by line acceptance speech
jasmine in the night and day
of breathing
a pan of heat
 greeted if unfamiliar
sound of distance, subdivided rocks
 taper to a road
acting of voting
leans don't disappear

"Instruments of Change" by Jane Rohrschneider (Canada/USA)
FOUR POEMS
By Natalee Caple

THE HORSE AND HIS MAN
A horse washed out to the ocean
and his man was left alone on the beach
weeping for the horse.

"More than water, more than a red tree
more than language, or a handful of glass birds,"

(he called)

"I want you between my knees moving
like the first brilliant thought."

UNTITLED
A dry pair of eyes and the wind

The bed seems so distant now.

Eyes are only eyes.

And all the doings, and undoings, of the human heart
dusty with history.

The streets begin to taste like fruit.

begin to guess the colour of your children's wishes.

Begin to stalk tomorrow's open arms.

Your stomach is a beacon, your hunger is the rotating light.

And the world is a circle of windows
shuttered by your eyelashes

quiet and deep with cold.

UNTITLED
At his arraignment

the girl whispered into the microphone

some uncertain murmur of love

A niche of flesh

and in the waking light

the position of her deepest want
given away in the newspapers.

The easy intervention of one history within another.

Because when he recited his crimes

his only defense a puny parachute:

"I could have waited to marry her, " he said.

"I could have drunk more wine."

UNTITLED
On the first morning of the world you lay naked beside a wax animal.

The confusion of substance still to be resolved.

The scraps of sky appearing between your eyelashes

at a ragged blue dress

And the residue of creation a slick film of sweat over the strange
curves of your breasts

and over the grass that you lay in.

Emerald filaments of tragic thinness.

And this was before the conspirators when you could touch yourself

with such impolitic softness under the sun’s impassive heat.

And the ash of your arousal carried on your skin for hours.

* Natalie Caple's newest book, The Heart is its own Reason, will be published by Insomniac Press (Toronto) in the spring of 1998. And, Natalie Caple is the editor of the tastefully designed and engaging publication Tortoiseshell in Black.

Propositions Concerning Class, Gender and Sexuality at a Canadian Dog Show
by Frank Davey

A male dog is called a dog.

Most of the exhibitors are women.

Many of the most serious exhibitors are lesbian although on average the sexuality of dog show exhibitors reflects Canadian demographics.

A female dog is called a bitch.

The sexuality of judges also follows population norms, although exhibitors joke more often about gay judges than about presumably straight judges, and thus increase their visibility.

Joking about the sexuality of judges follows population norms.

A large-boned female dog is called a doggy bitch, and seldom wins points or prizes.

"Bitch" at a dog shows is a neutral term although where a bitch has a woman owner or handler, it can be ambiguously applied.

A delicately structured male dog is called a bitchy dog. It seldom wins points.

Successful breeders of male dogs often have bred a prize-winning dog with a doggy bitch.

Some successful breeders are gay or lesbian.

A bitchy dog is often neutered or never permitted to breed.

Many pretty bitches are bred because they have become famous for winning prizes.

You could publish this text in an academic magazine or an arts magazine but not in a dog club magazine.

Although homosexual people have fewer children than heterosexual people, the proportion of homosexual people in the population remains constant.

A bitchy dog is usually all boy.

Dog show people rarely speak of the concept of queer dogs because this would run counter to the dog show economy.

Many dogs will fuck anything.

Some dogs do not like to fuck bitches, but this is usually explained by reference to trauma or unfortunate training.

Some dogs fuck other dogs to show the extent of their dominance.

Some bitches decline to be mounted and fucked and so their owners use A.I.

Most dogs are too nervous to fuck a bitch except on their own territory, but will fuck a weaker dog.

You could not publish this text in a school anthology.
6 POEMS
from Possibly Queen Street
by Victor Coleman

Appointment with the Real

About its theme the poem
Blustered
Croatians in New Zealand where
Death never
Entered the
Family had nothing to do w/ it
Gosh!
Have I gone mad?
i must have an appointment
Jewels have been inserted into my anus
Kilts had something to do w/ it
La meme chose
Many men are the same
Nurse, help me
Oh God! It’s three o’clock
Platitudes won’t do!
Quandary, the only time the mind
Really meant anything real
Shit: perfume
They’d always forget you
Until you came back to haunt them
Victor
With underwear
Xtremely drunk
Young no longer
Zorro had no life beyond his conflict

Possibly Queen Street

Authors will sign their books
Books will design their authors
Comic media (print) makes
Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde
Esquire notebooks sweat
For no reason
Grand guignol with meaning
Hid from the truth of their split
Into individuals on duty
Jury still out on the luck factor
Koans still reductive
Less loonies or
Magicians in tandem
Nowhere to go but out, with-
Out knowing where in is
Possibly
Queen Street
Rendering the
Syllables will make you mad
Time never squanders its instant
Uvulas came up w/
Various art, or bowel, movements
Well, Honey, maybe I never told you
X – fuck off
You know what I mean?
Zalad Dresden

New Era

Airport crowded with the Whistler-bound
brightly packaged skis in the lineup
caught in their own conundrum
delightfully mysterious
even when I conjure their destiny
fatuous backward hats
gifts got the host left in
heaps by the side of the road
it was a rich present
just like we had last Christmas
Kick me I just got here from the mysterious East
lack of brass band irrelevant
Manon gave my host the flu
now he grinds his teeth in sleep
over the impression that the floor is a bed
people get onto without knowing their destiny
queers at the back without question
Richmond Express only drops people off
such irony escapes the exiles
Taki’s asleep on the floor it’s late
under his head two pillows cushion the
view of the mountains that only imagined
Welcome to The New Era!
Xplain yourself, visitor!
You know you’re home when the
ZZZZs are Japanese

Possibly Queen Street (2)

As if light had anything to do with it
because the end of anything unravels
certain optical gadgets were utilized
dark at the end of the tunnel
escaping into some fourth dimension
frightened sighted beings in an otherwise murk
going nowhere in every direction at once
territorially disfigured but invisible
irony hides in the centre
jokingly disguised as closure, as if a
knack for destiny were
like a mucous ooze in flight, a
mnemonic mirror
no sane man could occupy
open to the possibility of future past
possibly Queen Street
queer becomes blind to the
right stuff
sight unseen
this should have been the first line
unknown destination of their quest
very long in the city of meeting
where the wild side is walked on gingerly
xonerated before the tribunal and
yesterday wasn’t tomorrow, and nothing
zany ever happens just once
A certain light turned up
because both Lynn and Stan are in hospitals
coercive as Goliath and
David as stoic as ever
eating the qualifier
for less than the contract demanded
gives good book launch
hopelessly sales-oriented
I wouldn’t even try to give her away
jolted from his current time
Ken Doll composes a mystery on the Web
Lunch not launch
Maureen’s on a bounce again
no one can stop her she’s doomed
each hand open surgery on the other
proper nouns without
qualms in the revisionist mix
ropes were on my mind
ships instead of restaurants
to emulate the time simply blend
understatement with hyperbole until it’s
very like The Last Virgin
worthy of an oil-free universe in a
xylograph of ancient spleens in
Zarathustrian polyphony

Ant Linguistics

An ant ran antic
Because Jesus was a footnote
Cadence
Dance is a drum
Ears have dreams
For want of company
Gone to ground
High places
Initially friendly, but
Jingos go crazy for nations
Kinky countries in the lap of God
Linguists caught on their tongues
More leverage always meant power
Never bothered with rhythm
Orifice a hole we’d never fill
People of the deer and wolf are few
Quick brown foxes tend to type
Resistance is hopeless
Sexual orientation could be your out
That’s extremely tight
Under much bakelight
Vermeer would’ve moored his boat here
Which letter did I need? Jealousy a matri-
X -- a pound in the heart, knot in the stomach -- Art with a capital
Y -- you know:
Zero

Editor’s note: There once was a literary periodical published in the 1960-70’s named The Ant’s Forefoot (printed at the Coach House Press), which was a predecessor of the tall narrow format now used by Rampike. Victor Coleman’s poem “Ant Linguistics” may be alluding to this curious but obscure fact.

THE INTRICATE FIBRES
OF OUR BRAINS
by Stuart Ross

Nobody said a word. Each face was frozen and expressionless. Fire hydrants and trash cans and newspaper boxes whipped by both sides of the car. Lawns flew by, with overturned tricycles and dogs on chains. Mr. Soak held an unlit cigarette between his lips; his hands clutched the steering wheel. The hands of Mrs. Soak clasped her knees. Tom Soak sat in the back seat, gripping the paperback novel in his lap. In the head of Mrs. Soak there were a lot of questions, writhing and thrashing like alligators in a swamp. Mr. Soak thought only of the thin length of concrete in front of his car. Tom stared unseeing at the pages of his paperback, asking himself a single question, over and over: Why do I cause them such pain? Why do I cause them such pain? Why do I cause them such pain?

Soon they were on the highway. Theirs seemed to be the only car there, and everything became suddenly quiet. Mr. Soak let out a big sigh. Mrs. Soak bit into her bottom lip. Tom closed his eyes and shook his head imperceptibly. A billboard rushed up on their left. It said, ADVERTISE HERE 671-0092. Neither Mr. Soak nor Mrs. Soak wished to advertise on the billboard. Tom’s eyes were closed and so he was unaware of the opportunity. Mr. Soak watched as the billboard became a tiny dot in the rear-view mirror and then disappeared. Mrs. Soak twisted her hands in her lap.

A thing looked funny to Mr. Soak. Tom’s head was way in the window on the other side of the road. It looked like little puffs of black. Mrs. Soak moved her lips but said nothing. Mr. Soak’s heart began pounding hard enough that he was actually aware of its pounding. Tom’s head bobbed up and down as he repeated his silent mantra: Why do I cause them such pain? Why do I cause them such pain? Then their car was stopped on the shoulder opposite the thing that had appeared to be black puffs from a distance. Tom opened his eyes and looked out the window. A car was crumpled into a concrete pole, and black smoke poured from under its hood. A priest hung half out of the door, which had swung open. A gold chain dangled over his upside-down face and a large cross touched the top of his forehead so that he seemed to be wearing a tiara. Mr. Soak appeared beside the priest and grabbed him under his arms. He slid the priest out of the seat easily and dragged him several yards from the burning car.

Tom turned his head and saw his mother running away. She ran in her low heels along the side of the highway, her purse bouncing at her side. Tom leaned forward and draped himself over the back of the front seat. He stretched out an arm and turned on the radio. A man was saying that there had to be limits or the fabric of society would disintegrate. A woman was saying that if one view was silenced, then soon another would be, and who knew where it would stop? Tom leaned forward again and pushed a button, and music came out of the radio.

When he looked out the window once more, his father was kneeling over the priest as if he were chewing the man’s hair. Black smoke still gushed from the car. Way up ahead, his mother spoke into a phone she’d pulled from a red box on a concrete pole. Tom leaned back in his seat. He pictured himself in a clerical collar, his face aged but smooth, his hair combed back neatly. He was standing at a pulpit, in front of a small congregation. His parents were a few rows from the front, and as he delivered his sermon he saw his mother lean over to whisper in his father’s ear. He thrust a finger in the air as his voice became deeper and built to a great roar. And then the car rocked and Tom realized they were moving again. Guard rails sped by on either side of the car and wind whipped through the small space at the top of Tom’s window. Mr. Soak was in front, leaning into the steering wheel, his jaw visibly clenched. Mrs. Soak sat beside him, reaching out one hand to catch a trickle of sweat that ran down the side of his brow.

Tom looked down and saw the priest’s head in his lap. The man’s face was covered in grease, as if he were in a minstrel show. Blood bubbled at his nostrils, and Tom cleared this away with a finger, wiping it on the side of his own pants. Tom looked along the length of the priest’s body, abbreviated now as his legs had been folded so he would fit into the back seat. The pants and shirt looked as if they’d just been pressed. Tom doubted that his mother had ironed the man’s clothing before they’d put him in the car. But the clothes were so neat, it was a miracle. There were some wet patches on the priest’s body, soaking now through the clothes, but still he looked presentable. The moisture looked only like sweat born of hard work, and Tom was sure this man worked hard.

When Tom glanced up again, he saw a police car speeding in front of them. Its emergency light was flashing and its siren was blaring. Mr. Soak’s car was practically skidding along to keep up. Tom could hear gravel pelting the sides of the car. He felt the priest’s wet fingers curling around his left wrist. A billboard flashed by, embedding its message in Tom’s brain. ADVERTISE HERE 671-0092. Tom had nothing to advertise. He wished that he did but he didn’t. He laid his head back and imagined himself in uniform, driving a police car, its emergency light flashing and its siren blaring.
The Right Mix of Washers and Dryers by Russell Harrison

The other day
I read this article in the
Wall Street Journal
and I was so perplexed I had to make a
copy and send it to my brother
who no longer reads the Journal because
a key financial indicator is now printed in the New York Times
The article was about a guy who worked
as a programmer for Microsoft Corp.
The guy was making $50,000 a year
and had "unrealized stock options valued at $250,000" but
he was tired of people telling him what to do so he quite
and bought a laundry

Bad move.

"The mix of washers and dryers"
the Journal tells us wasn't right;
he was locked in to a
six-year lease on a property on
which the rent was
"way too high"
and was losing $4,000 a month.
He was so depressed that "for weeks on end"
he spent days
and nights at the laundry
"finding an odd
peace in fixing
a broken change machine."

Finally he went back to work at Microsoft as a contract worker
covering the laundry losses
with his Microsoft pay.

The Journal is far and away
the best paper at cutting away
the bullshit.
You read a Times article and by the second sentence
internal consistency and/or logic has been
thrown to the winds
and you're asking yourself questions
trying to figure out where the thing fits in to the Times agenda
(i.e., how does it affect Israel)
know its relation to reality is tenuous at best
whereas you don't ask those questions
of a Journal article till you're through reading it.

But this one was different and I felt
something was missing here.
I couldn't figure it out.

So I xeroxed it and sent it to my brother.

"Well, the thing is this guy's impulsive
I mean that's the main thing here.
But also, Rusty, there are a couple of things
that you may not be aware of.
First of all working for a place like
Microsoft is rough. Usually you're on a project that should take
three years but they want it done
in one
and it takes a year and a half.
So there's always lots of pressure.
But I can understand the guy.
He wants to be his own boss...."

"Look," I interrupted. I can understand that.
But that's like -- I remember guys at the Post Office
they wanted to buy a gas station out on Long Island.
But that was the Post Office.
This guy's a programmer, right?
He's probably got a college degree.
He walked away from $250,000!"
Yeah, well that's crazy.
But I understand the small business.

I've thought about owning a dry cleaner.
"You've thought about owning a drycleaner!"
"Yes...
Look I walk past dry cleaners
and I think: 'That's a license to print money.'
You know what it costs to have a suit drycleaned -- eight or nine
bucks!
Eight or nine bucks! For what? Whooosh... whooosh.
Eight or nine bucks for that.
It's a license to print money.
Haven't you ever thought that
when you walk by some store on the street?
I mean maybe not a drycleaner's
but some store?
(I thought about it
and realized I had never had such a thought.
The only 'entrepreneurial' moment I can remember having
was my thought to publish a scholarly journal devoted to
literature, class and work.)

"Look, I'm not saying I'd buy a drycleaner;
I'm risk-averse so I'd research it thoroughly
and probably I'd find out it wasn't a good investment
and anyway I wouldn't want to work in a drycleaners
I'd get someone to manage it
and I'd just come by and pick up the money
and I know getting someone to manage it's a problem
they steal, they're not there
so I probably wouldn't do it.
But I've thought about it.
Look some stores you know can't make money.
I mean look at these copy shops.
I mean a nickel a copy
Come on!
You're never gonna make money
plus everyone can copy stuff at work for free.
I mean, there's a loser: charging for service someone else
does for free.
But I've thought about a drycleaner's."

leaving my plants (for J.)
by Laurie Kruk

I'm going to leave you,
soon
half-empty
this small apartment
layered with many occasions,
the visible, yellowing everyday
--blinding--
glimpse. Remove coats from the closet,
pack up stuffed animals we played together,
pluck photos--
curling, like October leaves--
off the fridge.

Move the computer, the stereo, the books--
it sounds easy, item by item--
clumsy, dust-furred things
you'll never miss
glad of the space
they'll uncover--
an extra desk, book
case, closet-half--

soon only ghostly outlines
will measure me truly.

But I'll be leaving my plants
fragile yet stubborn,
their nets of fibres resist
uprooting--
clinging to old pots
I'd swear they'd outgrown
THREE POEMS
by Sheila Murphy

AS ANY MENTION OF THE DOGMA
Threatened breakage qualifies
The mind to have endured
Risk ninety proof or something
Frightening, without which
Nobody will say the crafted line
Is worth a crafted line, nor will
A person worth her dizziness
Betray a fascination about
Liveliness, because the willow
Has to laugh, be lidded forward,
Allow breeze to dry freehand
Through glittered screens
Unsafe as milk as weeds
As any little kiss was once,
As any mention of the dogma
That was battle scarred and therefore worth the blood

THE OTHER VARIABLE, YOUR ABSENCE
process skewered just right
for analysis. have I told you lately
what you have not done. the Chinese
healing music off the bottom

ten indeed is healing
me. the other variable,
your absence,
factors. fathom
that. for now
I'm cold now
hot. somebody
measure how the heat in me
is up, forever I am.

stuck in this refashioning
of maid's quarters
in which I count the wash.

ALL THE PAIRS OF SHOULDERS IN THE ROOM
Medication prompts undressive forays
From the sphere of modesty
Whose supernatural deflowering
Ady cuff's a stranger and devours

Free-flowing information rounding
All the pairs of shoulders in the room
Of negatives and matte finished
Fractures of the truth

Nobody quite remembers, for the flowers
Are divorced from the storm
Windows, glass retains
Its shine less than procession,

Less than a curfew,
Yet aligned with miniature desires
Barely deserving of the term
Resulting from plea bargained affirmations

BUTTERFLY SONATA #2
By Sheila E. Murphy

choicG patronizes stasis.

Elbow room not nearly enough of independance when she plied the rope trick of her
jump requesting full court blessing optical. The suchness of camp counsellor
appearance never wavered. Would you think of blouses as maturing commas. The
custodian brought us Christmas pears. And tangerines. We said the Angelus to
ourselves. What must we talk about to equals with the shades drawn.

remembering transcends simple trust (can be interpreted as affection).

Slide rule was the topic of discussion. How we had to use it in place of calculators
which cost more than they are worth today. Where does this place our problem solving
on a scale of currency. Perhaps I'll stop in at the brokerage firm. I cancelled out of
anger to compare notes on recommendations printed on the shiny sheets semi-
persuasive. Fifty fifty is their track record. I hold one of each. Perhaps the best
description of romance.

she was in the habit of announcing her opinion like it was a diagnosis or prescription.

None of us was cold or hungry but the food in the warm restaurant promised
friendship if we needed it. Tomorrow somebody I know is coming over which if I were
busy would become a burden. The characters on my current favorite rerun sitcom
never need a calendar. They occasionally misfire and have to be somewhere. My
schedule, on the other hand, resembles the section of the newspaper in which the
classifieds are tangled up and eager to be paved.

breakfast forms communion practised as a rest.

When we have dreamed enough in silent unison our conversation feasts and meshes.
Confidence retreats from riflery because we earn it and observe. What good is
continuous improvement. Sacraments conform to specs put out by engineers who taunt
norms we have tripped over for years. Our friends are travelling to Sedona for a day
or two to watch red rocks be interrupted by snow. They're taking people from New
York who do not like the snow. Our friends who live in Arizona have forgotten to
subtract the season from attendant beauty. Tonight they caught us in a breach of sense
regarding politics that came from staring too long into books that cannot matter. I
suppose it is too late to ask indulgence. People move on into their lives. We discreetly
learn how to do better. Hoping that their issue will not be revived at inconvenient
moments.

Hostile takeovers nudge real stories from the headlines and connect the dots of fear.

Job protective versus job expansive once thrived as a point of conversation. As though
cronom sense negated necessary brazenness that goes along with keeping what is
yours. The prevailing brainwash suffocates an imp-lengthed shoulder purse or treats us
to philosophy half cooked half sweet constantly sour. Loose collections of ephemera
collapse into a basket. Trim with confidence the baskets and escape containment. Does

conversation demonstrates strained thought like baby food so bland it must be
nourishing.

calypso serve as modus for the toppy wavy mudguards to live off of; prepositions
ostracize our family nouns. what secrets do we employ when withering becomes
alternative again. my offspring take the form of text, do not wear little skirts or
require us to have levity enough to feed some number of these people who
require us to have memorized their names.
ABOUT THE CREATION
OF LIFE ON EARTH
by Robert Priest

What may likely be a merely technical experience in some species in the earthling is a beautiful ritual, written extempore, always in deep delphic tones, rivalling the euphonies of any nation's most sacred texts anywhere, and yet, as I say, the humans just spout this stuff. It is like breath to them. They inhale and exhale pure language at these and none can stop them as they speak, sing, sigh at one another just weaving in the attachments, drawing closer, first to the lips to taste, I guess, the deeper information of wet mouth and tongue. And there are lingering assessments of breasts, chest, bellies all are taken in and even here the mate might just deposit some fertile spermatozoa and be done but prior to the planting of the little seed in the big seed there is this dalliance with the pod. The pod that pouts and decorates itself with soft downs and springy turb. The pod that only accurate individuated caresses can attempt to open naturally, wet with its own desire. Remember these are very sensitive parts. There are billions of receptors in just the liquid rubbing part of themselves. So here it begins. The real uniqueness of earthly mating. For now the one with the little seeds, puts his bomb-topped stamen just at the lips of the one with the bigger seed and slowly she swallows him, he wedges into her. They are both partly liquid at this point. The most slippery and star-filtered parts of them are resolved into an instantly blissful oneness. This beyond what we call touch. Two minds are meeting here. Two entire sensualities intersect accurately and ecstatically. This should be it, but I tell you the wondrous deepens — the long bomb-headed stamen slides into the grasping gullet of the seed pod and sometimes here the legs will spread, buckle, tremble, embrace the full thrust of the delivering one. There are sounds arising now. Similarly tinged with this oneness this starness that is so rare in our species. But it is not just that the stamen must descend in this velvet tunnel to its deepest extremity and extrude its fine human seed storm. No. There is a retreat. A withdrawal. A re-entry. Indeed this is but the first of a great number of forays, back and almost out, then slowly deeply back in, and out to be slid in again deep, then out in and down the pelvic bones yawning to swallow one another, all to stroke the head of the stamen, the hanging testicles where fathoms of the seed like feathers in a calm must be aroused by this holy rhythm till a small wind gently lifts them. Under guidance from the egg these seed are gently lifted. They are pushed up into the blue sensate skies, touching, softly beyond the feet, from outside the universe a force rushes in all through the bones and circuits to meet and melt here into matter, into seed, into storm and throng, the seed is propelled out in liquid moonstone in strands of stardust. To head for the egg the egg which has been sending signals all along. Waiting for the one or two to choose to say which one is the one. And then its done.

Sonic
by Gordon Michael Allen

poetry echoes w/o saying
also that th word is a sonic phenomenon.
allen ginsberg says 'be candid': he did.
th bk is going to b th acoustic space
of th saying of th pome.
to what degree is formalism infecting yr vision?
(form is a verb)
...the lie of surfaces, of styles, of disposability of a lie.
this is becoming a document of participation in
the center.
personality becomes a habit. kick th habit!
poetry is not uniform. poetry not salon wallpaper-
th pome is an itchy surprise. a long hair
found in yr bum.
avant-garde is th advance guard
therefore followers, yr too late when ye get there!
burn yr safety net and soar
niffari sex:
those who, instead of voyaging
cast themselves into the sea,
take a risk.
those who voyage and
take no risk shall perish.
this tends to make fools uv allofus.
love yr tribe and love yrself.

one
cavern caving in
i pray sonic
resting in all the pulsing minds
of the room
seek:
they will find you weaving
blur car scenes
obstructed films
break the repeated orders
no harness:
only harvest
beautiful hair
this love poem

two
the song goes organic:
pancreas spreading
dangerous around sharks teeth
the brain finds a swimming rest
(seaweed among rocks)
brain holds fingers down
in spaces of the milling crowd
the milling crowd
bare feet in swept emptiness
on the mill floor
place held:
sun among cranking wheelmachines
light in grist

three
pray sonic:
a bare shoulder, this love poem
a hung jury:
is it the very stetch
of her brown eyes?
is it at all?
hanging hair down?
tiny scar above
upperlip?
a bitch of fire
in the courtroom:
mere poesy!
real nonbeing
clutches the white hot blackout coal

four
bop & th kill
uv motorcycle noise
dangerous
in th hardedge
uv sixuhclock sun
flanged in th
last burst
out
uv starfire

in th death
uv construction machines
there is real & painted shadow
(coming from th sun & th imagination)

and before dinner,
th streetcar drags th horizon w/ it
BEAUTY:
A COMPUTER-GENERATED POEM
by Henry Ferris

Here,
in this virtual place,
I have beheld
scenes of absolute beauty.

I have seen beings
whose bodies are made of gravity.
Grey-blue swirls
of radioactive dust
looped endlessly upon themselves.
Dancing the dance of curved light
on the edge of the event-horizon.

As I watched
they spoke to me
of an abstract point
where space and matter
pass through each other.

They beckoned
and
I

stepped

into their electromagnetic eyes.

There,
in the oscillating tunnel
of their awareness.
I let my body dissolve
into its different wavelengths
to prevent any contagion of self.

At first
there was nothing
but the staccato beat
of cosmological equations
and the widening joy of diffusion.

And then
there was a gout of light
as something beyond me
was given its own existence.

A meta-form
It materialized there
at the exact center of the quantum wheel.
Black stars whirling in its head.

And the smell
of invisible flowers
was caught in its nostrils.
Digital butterflies swooped and flickered.
An artificial breeze caressed its face.

And for a time
it just stood there
looking upward
at the infrared rainbows
in a nine-dimensional sky.
THREE POEMS
by Alexandra Leggat

Dexterous
my friend plays saxophone
in the subway
makes loose change and
makes loose living seem so easy
he’s got bohemian girlfriends
pierced noses with little gems in them
that twinkle in the dark
he keeps them bi-weekly
so many underground love tickets
swept onto the tracks
invariably picking one up
and taking a ride to the other side of town
where the rumble of engines is always escaping something.

he comes home early when the birds get up
crawls lonesome into his bed
dream material brewing
like the coffee I’ll be saving
to have with him
when he wakes
and tells me about the night
about the money
dropped into the horn case
about rich women who wink at him and sometimes
pay in phone numbers
and I think
blowing the tune nightly’s
gotta take some pair of lungs

This is Me Since Yesterday
I wrote something on the back of an envelope last night
on the tram car
going home tired and full of ale
I dream that dream
I was mobile on four chrome wheels
sitting comfy in the 57 T-Bird body -- yellow and white

Or is this another memory
misplaced -- a day or two too late
It could be Cleveland and I thought it was texas
and now I don’t know where I am or where I was going
All I know is I spent my last coin to board this machine
and it’s taking me to all the wrong places

I wonder when I walked past the Fire Station
I’d never noticed it reeks of the damage the engines have put out
I don’t think my Buffalo shoes
were making more noise on the sidewalk
than all the soldiers could imagine
I hate the way my travels echoed through the night
confirming this town’s emptiness

Or is this another memory
misplaced -- a day or two too late
This could be an old life
or it could be that new one I sneered at the thought of
Doubting that there could ever be life
after death after death after death

I look into your eyes through the grass
and say I was sorry

This Friend
You said the vacation restored you.
You saw coyotes
and found birch bark.
That was the highlight.
No, your husband was the highlight --
you said as an after thought
26th Birthday Poem (Triptych)
by Stephen Cain

Two days in Sudbury
and the world changes you.
A piece of a tree’s shredded skin and
the world changes for you.
Some slag.
Slag? I have to ask.
It’s the dregs of the nickel mines, you explain

And you’ll chip away all night at the bark
like you chipped away all day
on the piece of coral I brought you back from the Bahamas.
And I wish I had more to chip away on
than my very own bone.

We must not eulogize the living. And we must not communicate with the dead. But what about when you can’t communicate with the living; and if the dead should wish to tell you something?

My side of the story has been a long time coming. I have been telling it all along, but nobody listens. Because nobody ever asked me for my side of the story, even though I’ve told and told; nobody listens. That’s why I walk mainly to the dead. They are less distracted by time and possession and they have that sense of their own loneliness that makes for a good listener. I think it is because I have dog’s eyes. It is because my eyes are brown and watery and convey an indelible innocence that no one will listen to me. Or it is because my voice is too quiet but for now my voice will not be quiet. I know that right at the point where you begin to raise your voice, people start to listen. Not because they are interested in what you have to say, but because they are worried about their own safety. When I talk quietly I get the impression my words are falling into a deep well, without making a sound they get sucked up by the walls and furniture and I talk and talk but nothing come back, no echo, no nod of the head, and I can end these stories right in the middle of a sentence and nobody notices, nobody even wants to hear the end. But when you raise your voice your must be certain that it is the right time. For they will only listen for a few minutes, then you and your screaming will be relegated to the category of screams of the Woman Who Screams At The Bus Stop, and nobody listens to her anymore. I am going to use language to tell my story this time. Not just the language of hunger, and not just the language of walking with your head down, and not the language of always being cold or of smiling too readily; hoping too much, not all the languages that got missed last time. There are some who say that language is evil—because it leads us away from the real. But there are only a few, a small few experiences that are best left outside of language. The rest are designed to be remembered by the code of rhythms and grunts and repetitions, of inchoate yelling at bus stops, of these few spare words that are split, ragged, and falling all over themselves to tell the story.

MONDAY, AUGUST 19
It was last Monday I found out. Tuesday came and went, I caught a ferry away from the city, Wednesday disappeared, and Thursday, and soon it was the end of the week and I was sailing back on the ferry in the pitch dark in the wind and stars were falling down in the sky; not stars of course, but meteorites. Somewhere in that week I had swum in the ocean. It was freezing and the stones cut and bruised my feet. What I thought then was, “He will never again go to the ocean.”

My tongue sometimes swells up in my head. And it feels so heavy that I cannot lift it. It cleaves to my teeth with such immense pressure that I think my teeth will break off. Then my limbs become extremely heavy. I feel I have turned to stone, but I am aware of the surface of my skin and my skeleton inside the rock flesh. My bones are so fine, like brittle thread, and I think that they will snap under the weight of my arms and legs and that the papery layer of skin will burst. I become fascinated by this proprioceptive change and I watch it from within my body. I am unable to speak—can a stone speak? My jaws clench together, my teeth are like obstetrics holding back my enormous tongue. And then it passes. I think it might have something to do with epilepsy. He is an epileptic as well.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 16
My true love is crazy. That’s why I like him so. He takes me down the stairs of the ferry and out the back portal and there at the back of the boat is the wake and utter darkness with just the lights from the ship washing off the wake and athrobbing ship engine and the wind and a little salty spray. He stands on the flat platform only inches above the black water and the stars rise up from his face and her turns to me, laughing. He squats down, a few pounds of warm flesh only inches now above the boiling wake and wake has two meanings. I am paralysed on the other side of the portal, then I follow him and try to pick him up and drag him bodily back to safety for now there is a dread that he will be swallowed up by the water and the darkness, as all warmth and life is swallowed, as all brightness disappears.

I have never forced or pushed or pulled him in any direction, but now he must come away from the rapacious water.

Wake has two meanings, neither of which I can recall as I pull desperately at his shoulders, a few pounds of happy flesh and the whole cold ocean heaving up at him, waiting to wash him out into the wake, awake into the spray and the foam and the darkness, obliterates all life. I cannot budge him and I am ashamed of my fear. I retreat to the safety of a rail but I cannot look away.

Then he comes away from the water and we climb the stairs in silence to the deck and I say I am sorry but I tell him I was convinced that the ocean could suddenly lurch up and swallow him, sweep him out into that darkness that can’t be imagined, and he would float there in the wake, watching as the lights of the boat fade away and he would die, no one would know how or even where; and were he sucked away in front of me, what sacrifice could I make to the water to make her give him up? Would I follow him into the cold and darkness and death? For there is nothing for me anyway without love. On the deck under the falling meteorites, in the smoke and wind he stares into the water. “What a horrible lonely way to die. Could anyone hear you from down there?”

“No. Listen to the roar of the engines. No-one could hear you over that.”

“Could you swim to that island there?”

“In the total darkness, sinking in the waves, could you even see the island? Would you even know which direction to go?”
"What a lonely way to die."

Why do we talk so much and so intently about death? It's because, for young people, we've already lost enough to make us tired. We are used to unnatural losses so we don't even expect the natural ones. Griefs usually reserved for old age and wisdom caught us up before we were prepared. And we won't be caught off guard again. And now I am sailing back again to the city where my brother lives, whom I cannot find, whom I must not eulogize, and whom I cannot speak to. This is an unnatural grief I forgot to prepare for and one that has engulfed me completely. So much so that I have not yet spoken of it. So much so that it is like ocean water pouring into my face and taking words away.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 15

For the first time I realize that I am probably the only living person who has ever really loved my brother. This fills me with even more anguish. He is the only person I know who at all resembles me. Even though we are not related by blood, he is the only reflection of myself in human form. If you have no relatives you can appreciate the importance of this. His memory is my memory. Without him there are no other witnesses. Him telling a story: some of it true, some of it artful entertainment. He jumps up and waves his arms. He supplies the voices and actions like a song from a Christmas pageant. His voice gets louder and high and punctuated with laughter, snorts, devilish, purely diabolic, grins. He was animated and energetic, always moving. He reminded me of myself. His memory was my memory. It was the shame of these very memories that paralysed him. An ocean of memory washes up around his feet.

Can I make an offering for the warmth of one body? Mother Mary stares down at me as I light candles in the nave. I am not paying for these, I am panhandling for grace today. This flame for his head, Mother, this yellow flame for his heart. I hear the surf crashing against the stained glass windows already.

"Get out," she says, "you are upsetting everyone."

WEDNESDAY, 14 AUGUST

Now I have this useless love for you, brother, this love you cannot want. Because with it comes memory and truth about what you and I endured. It is easier to forget when I'm not around. So I've left you alone to spare you the shameful memories. I don't like it either, but you saved me from the fire, and the least I can do is thank you. Or at least apologize for having seen you suffer. Look, I am willing to forget everything, we can talk about the wonderful times we had. The least I could do is thank you for saving my life. You went before me, you taught me how to lie. You stumbled onto the secret of sanity in the transparent world of hatred and abuse. You taught me to lie as though our lives depended upon it, but with such offhanded carelessness that no one could doubt it, thereby guarding our true loves and desires.

And at the end. You came out of the shadows on the front lawn, with your fists up.

"Leave her the fuck alone." you said to him.

You were five foot three and he was six foot one and he left me alone. I got up from the pavement and saw you and him and he never touched me again.

You taught me to laugh at absurdity. You always noticed it. We were delightful, merry children on our own, laughing at everything, you were always leaving home and so was I but you made the border with a thirteen-year-old in a stolen car and I was so happy for you. The cop in the living room said,

"It's not funny, Kathleen." 

And I said, "How would you know? It is, in fact, the funniest thing in the whole fucking world."

We were delightful and merry and you gave me drugs and alcohol and you stuck needles into yourself and lived on potatoes and only called me for money. I always gave you money. And you told me I was too young to understand jail, I wouldn't know anything until I'd been in jail and about that time you realized that I knew and remembered and so you disappeared.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 17

There is no way to tell about our life together that is not completely ugly or just useless bad. So at least, that is how it seems to me. It was when we realized that we both have twisted bones in the same leg, that we both have epilepsy and that we both remember the man with no face who steals all safety in the house with the red-carpeted stairs that features in our nightmares and all the other horrors we share. After we found it all out you told me it was too difficult to tell and you wished that I would leave you alone. I left you alone.

But on a Monday six years after that I was in your city and I wanted to know. I thought you would be sitting somewhere quiet, living out in comfortable poverty your last years on earth, tired, but still able to enjoy simple things, telling stories, drinking beer, taking methadone; I wanted to introduce you to my True Love, because I told him all about you - about how you told me you had the liver of a fifty-year-old when you were barely thirty, about how you nearly lost your arm to gangrene, nearly got shot by the pigs, married a woman left bed-ridden by polio, had an orange kiten named Morris.

One thing that I knew about you for sure is that you had already suffered enough. I thought you would be living quietly. So I called an Aunt I hadn't spoken to for fifteen years to see if she had your number. She was the youngest sister, the aunt who said she liked us kids, the one whose wedding I was the only one to attend. She tells me you are in the hospital, but she won't tell me which one. She tells me I have to call our mother for any information about you, she won't tell me a thing. The whole act is a huge, cruel, manipulation. I feel like killing her.

I call all of the hospitals and I find out there are hundreds of private ones where you might be. I think about this for a day or so and then I break down and call her. It's been about six years.

"Hello, Mom?"

"I'm sorry, you must have the wrong number."

"It's me."

"Oh, hello."

Now all the rules have changed. It seems we must not eulogize the dead or communicate with the living. She tells me you have been in the hospital for over a year, in a wheelchair, unable to walk and unable to speak. They have finally silenced you, the only other witness. You had so much to say, you had so many beautiful lies to tell. And they have stopped you running as well. You don't deserve this. And she adds with a deep satisfaction, "He asked us especially never to give you his address. He doesn't want to see you."

She said when I asked for some details, "They found him on the floor, nobody knows what happened, this is how he's ended up."

There is a sense of satisfaction in her voice here as well. She is very happy that I turned out to be the evil one. Everything can now be blamed on me. She knew I was trouble and this proves it, of all the people in the world, he doesn't want to see me. This could be a lie, or, more likely, it's true and far more complicated than any vengeful lie.

Was he trying to kill himself? When they found him on the floor did he scrawl out his desire to keep me away?

I hang up the payphone in the park and all I see are silent dusty flowers, Seagulls drift dumbly by with their beaks sewn shut. The rocks cease their singing. Even the water is hushed. Now there will be no more truth, no more memories because the only other witness has fallen silent forever.

I feel like I climbed out of the trench by using his body. I feel the same wounds as him but inside. I feel like I deserved this more than him. I won't let anything silence me.

MONDAY, AUGUST 19

I am turned away rudely at the welfare office and told they will tell me nothing about where he is. They look askance at me as if to cry:

"Evil daughter, tearing apart happy families with your lies - even your brother - your only friend and co-conspirator has refused to see you. You are crawling with evil and you destroy everything you touch."

His body is my body. His memory is my memory. Now I am the last one. Who can walk, who can talk. He is swimming away from me in the darkness. I will not look for him. He has not called out to me except in the language of the dead. I hear him apologize, but I tell him not to. Between he and I all is forgiven already, it was forgiven before it happened. I hear his voice clearly in the wake saying what he cannot say to me in person, he is using the cells that never forget to communicate. His bones, his skin, his flesh calls out and this enough. This is all we can do. And in this very way I have already told him my side of the story.

Text/Image by Pete Spence (Australia)
THREE POEMS
By David Groulx

David Groulx is a noted Ojibwe poet. His writing has been anthologized frequently including in Let The Drums Be Your Heart (Douglas & McIntyre, Vancouver). He currently lives in Thunder Bay, Canada.

Dreaming of Eagles
I’ve loved you
like a long echo in the
earth’s corpse
with bed-time stories
of Himmler and Columbus
of Civilization
that has embraced me
and
Indians Don’t Call
It Home Anymore
I’ve done my time
America
I’ve rolled up this
paradise
and smoked it
pumping old war stories
into my veins
suffocating Coyotes dreams
for
tickets to Disneyland
and the nightmares of Paradise lost

My Grandfather’s Lodge
A gift to the people
in a dream to the people
came to gift
walking the sweetgrass road
with rattles, bundles, and pipes
suffering
rocks and feathers
keep the fire

rake the violence
into the sacred fire
burning history
by Cedar blankets
seven grandfather stones
and water gifts
listening to the old men
singing to Eagle clan
song
in old Ojibwa

Images: "The Storyteller’s Lodge"
Series by Arthur “Butch” Elliot

Excerpt from:
THE STORYTELLER’S LODGE
by Rolland Nadjiwon

The Storyteller’s Lodge is an extended fiction by rising author Rolland Nadjiwon. The following is an excerpt that deals with this First Nations author's experiences in Northern Ontario. Rolland Nadjiwon is of Potawatomii descent (Turtle clan).

In the fall of 1967, I took a job teaching in a very isolated Ojibway community in Northwestern Ontario. Their first school was built by Indian Affairs about 10 years before I arrived as their new teacher. Contact with white people was minimal and irregular except for tourist guiding, the teachers who had been there before me, and an occasional scattering of bureaucrats from Indian Affairs. A white Catholic priest came in about twice a year. A white Baptist missionary and a doctor from somewhere in Minnesota flew in about once a month to mend bodies and souls. The minister and doctor from Minnesota were the most regular white people into the community, and the most accepted. Most of the people even liked them, except Muhjibenashe. Sometimes carpenters working for Indian Affairs would come in to build an annual quota of new houses.

It was a very old time community—very traditional in the old Ojibway way of life. The younger people spoke English when it was necessary, or if pressured to do so, but the functional language of the community was Ojibway. There were no modern amenities, not that anyone from the community, including myself, felt their absence. I had grown up much the same way but a little closer to town and I probably knew a little more about white people.

I also knew about Indians and Indian culture. After all, I was an Indian. Maybe my tribe was a little bit different, but I was still an Indian. I had completed elementary school, high school, and some college. I was a well-educated Indian, for those times, I had also worked with a number of Indian political organizations in the championing of our Indian cause. I had something to offer these people, my people. Or so I thought at the time.

I arrived in their community in September, a couple of days after school should have started. No one minded. As the plane, a small Cessna, taxied into the landing, people began to gather for the event. Some of the young men sat along the bank of the river and watched me unload my supplies from the plane—mostly foodstuffs. After I had done most of the unloading myself, a couple of them came over and helped. They had taken time to check me out first, I guess. I did look like just another white man compared to them, and I was a school teacher. That made me pretty different, suspect even. They would take their own time about this, and some of mine if necessary.

We hauled the supplies up to the teacherage, a small log cabin with no water, no electricity, and no toilet or bath. It did have a wood stove, oil and gas lamps, a propane refrigerator and a propane cook stove. Comparatively, to the community, I was wealthy, and even in comparison to my family back home. My silent helpers placed everything neatly outside the door on the veranda, or on the ground near by. They retired to a hilllock about a hundred feet away, rolled up a smoke, and were having a jolly good time talking and laughing. I had to keep chasing away the dogs who kept nosing into my food supplies and trying to urinate on them. They watched me with beady red eyes, snarling and raising their hackles every time I moved toward them. I’m afraid of dogs. Those dogs knew it, and I’m pretty sure all those guys knew too. I could still see their shadows moving about in the almost darkness and hear the music of their laughter.

I moved into my new home just after dark. One of my first tasks was to get in a supply of water. I grabbed two galvanized pails and headed down to the river, some pretty mean looking dogs following me. I think their eyes, ever so slightly, glowed red from the inside. Coming back up the hill, I could see a number of people had joined the young guys on the hilllock to sit and watch, young children and babies-on-hip included. I was now on trial and had better pull it off right—a modern version of running the gauntlet was how I felt. I took my water in leaving the dock wide open behind me, lit my lamps and put some water on for tea. If anyone wanted to come in, the door meant they were welcome, or they could stay outside and look in if they preferred. They preferred the latter, I could hear them and once in a while see the flare of a match and the glow of a cigarette. I turned on my transistor in front of the open window so we could all have music and busied myself with brewing a large pot of tea.

Shortly, I heard someone approach the open door followed by a soft knock. Indians don’t usually knock unless you’re a stranger, or they think you’ve crossed over. I was a stranger and obviously crossed over.

"Come in," I said trying to sound like I had lived there forever. A man and woman came in. They were both short, dark and stocky. The lady was carrying a brown paper bag.

"Hello," the man said. "You’re the new teacher." It was a statement rather than a question.

"Yes," I smiled.

"I’m John. This is Liz.""Hello, I’m Rolland," I said, shaking their hand. They had working hands, but
refrigerator to harden up. The man stumbled over my name.

so gentle. Mine were, in comparison, soft and fair as the lard I had just put into the
and cleared a spot on the table so not to crowd them with all my unpacking. I put out
anyone use so much sugar in one cup of tea. We sat in silence, me drinking hot tea
and Liz and John drinking hot syrup. We had another cup well steeped in more long silence.

Out of desperation I asked, "Would you like some juice?" I had brought a
couple of cases of canned orange, tomato, grapefruit, and apple juice for my winter supplies. I would go back out again at Christmas, if I was lucky, and replenish supplies. The juice was stacked against the wall by the door and seeing them in the deep silence of the yellow lamplight inspired me to intelligent conversation.

"Okay," They both said, and nodding timidly as little school kids. "Would you like orange juice..."

"Okay," more nodding.

Now, I didn't know which to open, so I opened a can of orange juice, a can of tomato, and a can of apple—just in case. The mistake had been my own. I was learning how to talk again. We sat there drinking hot tea, hot syrup, and canned juice chasers.

Liz spoke the first conversation, "Teacher," she said, "John and me, we look after the school." She indicated toward John with a quick movement of her lips—Indian fashion. "John, maybe she fix something broken. Me, I scrub, wax the floors, and wash windows too. Maybe I wash and scrub your house too, if you want. Indian Affairs, she pay us to do it all. This floors too. I guess maybe we're, how you say it, janitors?" she said embarrassed, her face bursting into the most charming and friendly smile I had seen in a long, long time. Her hand moved up quickly to cover it. We all started to laugh and John covered his mouth too. Liz had used a big word and had spoken in English too, right in front of the new teacher. We all laughed.

The ice was broken. We talked some more and laughed a lot. We drank all the tea and the two cans of juice. It was some party. They were getting ready to leave around eleven o'clock. Liz asked, "Teacher. Did you bring any store bread?"

"Yeah, I got a whole box. Did you want some?" Damn—another social faux pas, jumping ahead with a question. Patronizing with second guessing, John shifted his glance away.

"No," Liz said. She reached down and picked up her paper bag. I felt stupid.

"But teacher, I'll trade you bebezhick, one each." She pulled two loaves of
dhome-made bread from her bag and put them on the table.

"I make them myself this morning," she said. "I make good bread, teacher. Sometimes somebody buy it."

I looked at the plump little brown loaves. I hadn't had home-made bread for a long time. My mother always made it at home when I was a kid. "Sure, I'll trade," I said placing her two loaves end to end beside a loaf of my store bread. Mine was just a bit shorter than her two, and a bit taller. I could feel them watching me so intensely. "One and a half loaves," I said like a pronunciation. Liz clapped both her hands over her mouth and they both laughed. We all laughed.

"Mine taste better," she said, "and the holes are smaller." She knew her bread. I laughed. John was watching, his dark eyes twinkling in the lamplight.

"I'll give you three loaves for your two," I said.

Extending my generosity with the lamplight twinkling in her eyes she said,

"Maybe four, eh teacher?" No smiles.

"Ok, four," I said laughing and turning to the bread boxes.

"No teacher," she said. "One each. Bebezhick, I'm just tease too." We all had a good laugh. We were friends now. She took the two loaves and put them into her paper bag. I put a third one in and winked. She laughed and they both left.

That was my introduction into their community. Liz was to become my guardian angel and confidante for the duration of my sojourn there. Over the next couple of months she adopted me and soon became my second mother. There would be times when I would have need for that.

As I have said, this was a very traditional community. They followed the midewin, the ancient way of life. Almost every weekend when the community was together and uninterrupted there were dances. Feasts were carried out throughout the year according to the season, or according to the community rites. They also followed the drum society and those sets of fasting, feasting, and ceremonies were carried out also at the appropriate times.

This was my environment, my new home for at least the school year. Being Indian myself, very little was exclusive to me. I attended the school for feasting and ceremonies—something banned by previous teachers, and frowned upon by Indian Affairs. The school became a major focal point of the community. It was their school and I let them have it. This act brought me unexpected friendship and trust from the people and a necessary secrecy, also unexpected, toward outsiders. I was invited, with tobacco, to all the feasting and ceremonies, and often asked to lead some of the dances. This was a great honour. My life became filled with the life of the community. Like a child, I was learning so much about what our people back home had forgotten.

One Sunday afternoon, I was preparing lessons for the week and looking out the window across the river toward a hill. I had not noticed but there was an unusual round clearing near the top. The autumn sunshine was very warm and the autumn air intoxicating. I didn't feel like working on lessons so I laid on the couch to rest and think. Instead, I fell asleep and dreamed.

In the dream I went down to the river, took a canoe and started paddling across the river toward the hill I had been staring at earlier. I was very aware that I was dreaming. I landed the canoe on the river's edge and strolled west a mile and a quarter across, and started up the hill. I was carrying a bundle I hadn't been carrying when I left the village. I didn't know where it came from or what it was but I was carrying it with me. I started up the hill knowing exactly where I was going but not why. I arrived at the clearing. It was quite ordinary, surrounded by fir trees, maple, oak, poplar—a regular northern Minnesota forest. No trees or shrubs grew in the clearing only mosses and short grasses. If it had been cleared round intentionally, nothing showed of the labour, not even a stump. It was a fine day, not bright sunshine but maybe autumn or late spring. A hazy kind of day. I sat down on an open patch of barren flat rock and opened the bundle. It included a Hudson's Bay point blankets, a wooden bowl, a pouch of tobacco, and an Indian pipe. I spread the blanket, placed the tobacco into the bowl, filled the pipe, and lit it. I had never done anything like this before, in a dream or in real life. I seemed to know what to do. I smoked to all the directions, the earth and sky, and to the grandparents and grandfathers.

Around the periphery of the circle I could hear a faint buzzing or humming. There appeared to be heat waves shimmering around the tops of the trees. I had laid the pipe down on the blanket so I could watch and listen. The heat waves, or shimmerings, took the form of four huge pillars taller than the tree tops. I watched.

The pillars started to clarify into figures that seemed wrapped in aluminum foil and very tall. By the time they were clear to my vision, they were no longer wearing foil but were dressed with old time Indian clothing; long hair, braids, and a lot of leather. They were all walking toward me. They sat down around the blanket. I noticed there was no difference in our size. On first appearance they had been taller than the trees. Each put a pinch of tobacco into the bowl. I refilled the pipe, lit and passed it. Each one, in turn, smoked passing the pipe around the circle until all the tobacco was gone.

The pipe came back to me empty. I laid it down on the blanket and sat quietly and still. Nothing was spoken. There was no sound at all. It was as though the entire clearing was sealed off from the rest of the world—like in a sweat excepting that there was brightness.

The figures arose, walked toward the trees which had re-appeared at the edge of the clearing and stood facing inward toward the centre. They began to shimmer and disappear as they had when they first arrived. I emptied the ashes from the pipe, placed the rest of the tobacco into the tobacco pouch, rolled up the bundle and sat.

I woke up laying on the couch in my living room with everything the same as it had always been. I got up and looked out the window toward the hill. There was nothing unusual. I couldn't help staring at the round spot and thinking about my dream. Liz was coming up the path toward the school. I knew she would stop by and visit. I put on a pot of tea. I felt lofty and calm. Liz came in, her cup of tea sitting ready and, of course, a large bowl of white sugar.

We did some small talk. I decided I would tell Liz about my dream—very
detail. When I finished, Liz kept looking at me. I hadn't expected such a serious and heavy response. "You dreamed that, teacher?" she said, still looking at me. "Yeah," I replied. "Come here, I will show you the place I saw in the dream." I took Liz into the living room and showed her the circular bare spot on the hill far across the river. She was very quiet and seemed pensive.

"Teacher," she said, "that's what Muhibenashes do sometimes."

"What?" I asked, a bit bewildered. "What does he do?"

"He talks with those spirits like you dreamed. Sometimes he goes over there and talks with them." "What spirits?" I wasn't sure I was comprehending everything.

"The ones you talk about in your dream."

"You gonna be kidding me." Something you don't say to an old timy Indian. They don't kid. "You're teasing me." It was my turn to stare at her.

"No, teacher. I'm not kidding. Something he sings his song for four days. And then she paddle across the river and climb up there and wait for them. He said his song takes four days to get there, and they take half a day to come there. We see them from over here in the village, but not too clear. They look like the air is shaking and you see right through them." She vibrated her hands and fingers in front of me to illustrate how they moved. That was exactly how they looked before they came and sat with me. "There is four of them," she said. "They are taller than the trees. Muhibenashes, he smokes with them. Nobody goes to that place."

I could feel a definite chill over my body. "Liz," I asked, "why does he call them? What does he do this?" I had a million questions to ask. "Maybe you should talk to her," she said. "Me, I don't know much about those things. I gotta go, teacher. I gotta clean the school. John, he is coming now." I looked out the kitchen window and could see John walking slowly up the hill. Liz started out the kitchen door and toward the school. She paused. "Kinomahay ininii, she said, "go and visit Muhibenashes. He knows that stuff."
I never got the feeling that Liz didn’t want to talk about it because of any kind of fear, or reluctance on her part. Like she had said, “Go and see Muhjibenashe. He knows that stuff.” What had started out as a neat dream to tell Liz, one we could both laugh about, turned out to be something more serious than I had been prepared for. Maybe Liz too.

I couldn’t go and visit Muhjibenashe, I was afraid of him. He was nothing more than the most powerful mishkiki inimih in the whole community and, perhaps, the most powerful jesukii inimih in the whole area. The stories alone of his spirit battles were enough to scare anyone, even the inquisitive. I had already heard a lot of them and, probably, far less than could be told. He was a wabowen, a jesukii inimih, a mideedo, and a head mideo, I was told. Yes, I feared him with a deep respect for all the things he knew and I knew so little about.

I never went to see Muhjibenashe. His youngest son and daughter were students at the school and his older son, about seventeen, was one of my favourite partners for a good game of cribbage. Muhjibenashe I avoided. There were social drum dances every weekend at the school, but Muhjibenashe never came to any of them. I knew he had received the tobacco but he never came. I think I was always relieved. His oldest son often came and sang on the drum with the rest of the young guys. I would often see Muhjibenashe from a distance, and people talked of him. I would hear anything near him.

The school was also an apothecary of sorts. He didn’t speak to me and I didn’t look at him, but he gave them to one of the younger kids to take down to him. That was it.

Always later and during the winter, Jim came into my place and said, “Muhjibenashe wants to see you.” I just looked at Jim. “Yeah,” he said grinning. “He wants to talk to you.”

“Muhjibenashe wants to talk to me?” I asked like I didn’t understand English anymore. “What the heck does he want to see me about?”

“How should I know,” Jim said. He spoke real good English and was about my age. We were very good friends except when he got drunk and tore the buttons off my shirt, every time. I would get so damned mad at him but his mother, Liz, would always fix my shirts. She would give Jim a good scolding about harassing the teacher and, then, he would always be sorry. We stayed good friends. No one ever drank too much too often—just a little extra home brew sometimes—when we had it.

It was hard to make because you needed vanilla or lemon extracts and lots of raisins. None of the traders would sell these items to Indians so we had to bootleg them from in town connections.

I wasn’t anxious to move too fast. “I don’t know what the old bearwalker wants,” Jim said laughingly. “We were playing cards over at Lucy’s and somebody came in and told me to come and get the teacher. Muhjibenashe wants to see him.”

I still wasn’t moving and Jim said, “Com’on. I’ll take you over on the Bombardier. I got it across the river today.”

It was so cold moisture was freezing out of the air and it was dark, very dark, coming into the light of the oil lamp. In the centre of the room a small tin air tight wood stove was glowing red adding more light and a measure of warmth. Muhjibenashe motioned us to come and sit close to the stove. That’s where everyone always sat when they weren’t busy moving around the house. I could feel the cold behind me and the circle of warmth in front of me. I took off my mitts, pulled up my hood and sat down on the waiting chairs. Muhjibenashe handed us each a mason pint jar and filled it with warm tea. A pot was always sitting on every stove in the village. About once a week, I think, maybe they were dumped and refeshed, otherwise, just more tea and water was added to the kettle. We filled the rest of our jars with lots of sugar, a custom which I had long since adopted, and can milk. We drank our warm sweet tea in long silence.

Finally Jim and Muhjibenashe started to speak with each other in Indian. Just conversation. I had nothing to say so I sat there in silence. I could feel the room starting to chill. Muhjibenashe must have felt it too. He got up and put more wood into the stove. More silence except for the sound of the fire and movement in the shadows outside the lamp light.

In English Muhjibenashe said, “I got something to show you.” He went into one of the bedrooms where I could see the glow from another oil lamp through the opened blanket. His wife must have been sitting in there. That’s where the women always went when someone came into the house, especially if it was a stranger. If women came in too, they went into the bedroom with the other women. "Unbelievable." Come here," Muhjibenashe said, poking his head back out and motioning me to follow him. I went into the room. His wife wasn’t there. There was just him and I. He was speaking only English to me. I was glad. I didn’t think I could have understood much Indian at that point. It was difficult for me most of the time. I stood waiting. He dug around a bit and placed something on the bed. He turned the lamp up a bit and motioned me to sit on the bed with the bundle between us. I sat watching his movements.

He started talking to me as he fumbled with the bundle. It seemed to be as difficult for him as it was for me. He opened out the bundle and there was a beautiful carved wooden bowl in it along with some herbs, tobacco and, what I gathered to be, fetish charms. I just looked. I had never seen anyone open a bundle like this before. Heck, I had never seen anyone open a medicine bundle.

Muhjibenashe picked up the wooden bowl and passed it to me. I took it and felt its velvety smoothness. Even in the dull lighting the grain showed so deep it was like looking into a holograph. I couldn’t stop passing my hands over it and looking into it. "Kinomageh inimih," he said. “This bowl, I think maybe you seen it before.”

“I didn’t say anything,” I said. “I didn’t know what he was talking about. I had never seen anything like this before. “I got it across the river,” he said. “I think maybe you went where I got this.”

I was sitting listening to a man I was terrified of and he was showing me things my wildest imagination could not have guessed at. My sense of reality was shorting out. I kept looking at him, his dark eyes shining in the lamplight. “Across the river where the spirits come. I think you went there.”

The dream I told Liz. There had been a bowl wrapped up in the bundle I carried up the hill. When I opened it, there had been a bowl in it. I hadn’t taken great notice of the bowl. Everything about the dream had been so awesome I hadn’t noticed anything special about the bowl. I looked at it trying hard to connect it with my dream. I didn’t know for sure if that was what he was talking about. I had never told anyone but Liz. Maybe she told him. I didn’t know.

“I think maybe you should have this bowl,” he said. “Nobody but me ever goes there. Maybe you should have it.” He took the other objects out of the kerchief and wrapped the bowl in it tying the four corners into two knots. I wondered if Liz had told him. He handed me the bundle and I sat holding it an uncertain minute. I didn’t know where to go or what to do. I sat there in silence. I could feel the bowl inside my jacket. It felt warm.

Next day Liz came to visit me. "Teacher," she said. “You went to visit him last night.”

“Yeah,” I answered.

“So how was it?”

“No,” I said.

“Did she talk to you?” There is no gender in Ojibway and that always carried notice of the bowl. Everything about the dream had been so awesome I hadn’t noticed anything special about the bowl. I looked at it trying hard to connect it with my dream. I didn’t know for sure if that was what he was talking about. I had never told anyone but Liz. Maybe she told him. I didn’t know.

“Really?” Liz asked. “Did you talk to him?”

“I thought maybe you should have this bowl,” he said. “Nobody but me ever goes there. Maybe you should have it.” He took the other objects out of the kerchief and wrapped the bowl in it tying the four corners into two knots. I wondered if Liz had told him. He handed me the bundle and I sat holding it an uncertain minute. I didn’t know where to go or what to do. I sat there in silence. I could feel the bowl inside my jacket. It felt warm.

Next day Liz came to visit me. “Teacher,” she said. “You went to visit him last night.”

“Yeah,” I answered.

“How was it?”

“Did you talk to him?” she asked.

“No,” I said.

“Did she talk to you?” There is no gender in Ojibway and that always carried over into English.

“Yes. He gave me something.”

“That’s good,” she said. “That was all that was ever said about it. Liz went over and cleaned the school. John came up a bit later and helped her. I could hear them talking to each other as they worked—none of it related to the incident.

Some years later, after I had left their community, I was at a pow wow dance. I used that bowl in a ceremony. People were starting to get back to their own Indian path. A man was there calling himself Chief Kitipo. I don’t even think he was an Indian—not even a little. He said he was Micmac. He was more like one of those whisky traders. He saw that bowl and somehow, he stole it from me. I was pretty upset I wanted to get it back but he went over to Russia some place pretending he was an Indian medicine man. I saw his picture and a white up in the newspapers about him being a big Indian medicine man touring Russia. He didn’t know the first thing about things like that. He was just a thief. I guess maybe I will never see that bowl again but it was only a dream anyhow — except for Muhjibenashe.”
An Excerpt from:
A Windigo Tale
by Armand Garnet-Ruffo

Armand Garnet-Ruffo’s latest book Grey Owl: The Mystery of Archie Belaney (Coteau Books), was excerpted in the last issue of Rampike. In this issue we feature a segment from his new play A Windigo Tale which presents an Ojibwe world view. This play has been workshopped in Banff and Ottawa.

Closets can mend
sinister days, yet these losses hum
in the walls.
"Seal At Stinson Beach"
Roberta Hill Whiteman

Tired (a preface)
He says she is tired of waiting for the end of scream.
What was it she told him? Behind her dark eyes
Tired
He says she is tired of waiting for the end of scream.
to stop an uncle from entering her bedroom,
there is a child jabbing kitchen knives into a door
a brother who already has,
a mother weeping abandoned and drunk,
a father who has forgotten who he is,
knows only there was once a family.

Of all the permutations.

Notice his quivering lip, his flaw of imagination
craves. He thinks of losing himself in some bottomless
bottle and never looking up. Or in some glass tower
and never looking down. He could spend
time making money and doing it for his people
(as they say). He would live the dream of never
looking back.

Tired.

He sees himself sleeping dreamless, inside
a bed of earth, where roots like transparent fingers
stroke and hold, where slugs and beetles wait
naked and indiscriminate. Like bear ·

He loves her beauty and more her strength
but a moon who comforts and guides. Where memory
is good, and the healed are numerous.

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DAVID:

LILY:

DAVID:

LILY:

DAVID:

LILY:

DAVID:

LILY:

DAVID:

LILY:

DAVID:

LILY:

DAVID:

LILY:
LILY: Out to take some pictures. (Silence) How’re you feeling?
DORIS: Fine, the rest did me good. Oh you didn’t put the water on. (Moving to put kettle on, becomes aware of Lily’s silence)

LILY: Here I’ll get it.
DORIS: No I can get it.

LILY: I said I’ll get it!

DORIS: (She stops abruptly) is everything all right dear? How are you feeling?

LILY: (Pause) I’m fine.

DORIS: There must be something going around.

LILY: I’m fine I said. (Pause) You know last night after David went to bed there was something. I wanted to ask you.

DORIS: How many years has it been now, I mean since you were home. I must have ridden that old train all the way down to Toronto. I don’t know how many times.

LILY: And during all your visits we’ve never talked.

DORIS: You’ve done well. Such a lovely apartment. Imagine even a dish washer! and a nice new car.

LILY: And lots of baggage mother.

DORIS: And now finally you’re home. It’s you who’s come to see me after all these years. Must he at least fifteen, yes I would say at least fifteen.

LILY: You remember don’t you.

DORIS: And David seems so nice.

LILY: Ma! I’m asking.

DORIS: What did you say he does.

LILY: (Exasperated) He’s a writer!

DORIS: Yeah the book.

LILY: There won’t be any book. You know as well as I do, it will never happen. Too much has already happened.

DORIS: I thought you would’ve at least come back for the funeral. We were expecting you, your Auntie and me.

LILY: I couldn’t. I was busy. I had to work.

DORIS: That’s what you said when I called.

LILY: That’s right. And what else?

DORIS: What?

LILY: What else did I say.

DORIS: I don’t know.

LILY: Think. Grade eight, I was finally going into highschool. He was going to show me the cradle and all. Right? You better rest. Do you want some water or some...

LILY: Ma? (Grabs her by the arms).

DORIS: (Pulls her away) (With Lily’s head in her lap, she begins to sing:)

***

LILY: Do you remember it so vividly.

LILY: How could I forget?

DORIS: We had good times.

LILY: Not always.

DORIS: Better than some. Better than some! That’s what supposed to mean? What I want to know is if you knew about it?

DORIS: He was my husband.

LILY: If that’s what you want to call him.

DORIS: He was your father.

LILY: Why did you want to wonder. I don’t anymore.

DORIS: He was a good provider.

LILY: Provider. Protector. What else?

DORIS: What do you mean?

LILY: Do I have to spell it out.

DORIS: Is that why you came. I won’t hear it.

LILY: All I want to know is whether or not you knew about it.

DORIS: You know he used to take me dancing when we first met. That’s when I was working in Toronto.

LILY: Ma!

DORIS: We would go to the Royal York Hotel where some of the best big bands used to play: Satchmo, Duke Ellington, Glenn Miller. He was hauling lumber in those days and would drive all day and night, drop of his load off and then come and see me. Saturday he would show up at the restaurant where I was waitressing all nice and cleaned up and take me out for the evening. A real gentlemen and a good dancer. You could say he swept me right off my feet. You know I’d hoped to leave the north, but after we married I ended up right back here. Funny how things work out.

LILY: All I remember is his tongue.

DORIS: Lily, I won’t stand for this! Not in his house.

LILY: That’s right! It was all his, the house, you, me!

DORIS: I don’t understand why are you doing this?

LILY: Because it’s eating away at me. I need the truth. I’ve told you mine.

DORIS: Have you?

LILY: Ma wipe up.

DORIS: (Confused) I don’t understand.

LILY: Abuse mother. It’s about abuse. Did you know it was happening or didn’t you? I need to know.

DORIS: What? What are you saying?

LILY: Did you cover up for him?

DORIS: It’s not possible. No, no I won’t hear this! (She puts hands over ears)

LILY: You’ve got to (Pulls her hands away).

DORIS: (Collapsing into chair) Besides he’s coming home. He can answer for himself.

LILY: What? What did you say?

DORIS: He is. (Wiping tears) He’s coming home. I was meaning to tell you.

LILY: That’s impossible.

DORIS: It’s over. What’s done is done. You can ask him yourself.

LILY: Do you know what you’re saying?

DORIS: He’s on his way. Yes he is, this very moment, as we speak. If he’s done any wrong then we must ask him and then forgive him. It’s God’s will.

LILY: Ma he’s not coming home. He’s dead. Do you understand dead. He died last year.

You sent me the newspaper clipping yourself. That’s why I’m here.

DORIS: And when he comes he’ll explain everything. Don’t you worry my little girl.

LILY: No he won’t. He’s dead you hear me. He’s fucking dead! dead! dead! It’s you who’s got to tell me. (Grabs her by the arms).

DORIS: I’ll bake a cake. That’s what I’ll do. And you can blow out the candles, you always loved doing that!

LILY: Ma? (Suddenly realizing something is terribly wrong, becomes worried)

LILY: (Suddently realising something is terribly wrong, becomes worried) Are you all right? You better return. Do you want some water or some... (Realising the kettle is boiling) tea. Here I’ll get you some.

DORIS: Yes, I would like that. I am feeling a bit tired. (Pause) Do you think I’m presentable. How do I look?

LILY: (Kneeling at Doris feet) Fine Ma fine. I’m so sorry. (Hushed) We’ll make it better... I’m home now.

DORIS: (With Lily’s head in her lap, she begins to sing:)

Rock a-bye baby
On the tree top
When the wind blows
The cradle will rock
When the bough breaks
The cradle will fall
Down will come baby
and all.

***
NIGHT AND DAY
Judy MacDonald

I've been running for a long time. My hands are fists. My feet are bare. My straw-blonde hair is bright when some light shines through the leaves high above. The air is cool, but I know it would be hot but for the breeze.

The others are just a little bigger than me. They're men, dressed up like in National Geographic. They have spears. They wear jewellery. Their faces and chests are painted bright colours. I know their skin is much darker than mine. Mine is white-white.

When I hear them move, it's not because of their feet or breathing. It's because of a soft sound, like when something goes fast, like the wings of a bird when it's landing on a fence. I don't know if I'm running away from them or not. I'm not afraid, exactly, but I don't belong.

They are aware of me.

In class, we learn to count. One of the things we sing is, one little two little three little Indians, four little five little six little Indians, seven little eight little nine little Indians; ten little Indian chiefs. In the book with this song, there are pictures of boys who look almost like me or my brothers, but they're wearing feathers on their heads and pants with fringes and soft leather shoes the teacher says are mocassins. They have painted faces. They look mischievous.

For a show-and-tell, Shaun wears a costume like this one. His mom bought it for Hallowe'en. His afro puffs out around the band holding the feather. This band is bright red and yellow, and it crosses his forehead. Shaun says that indians went, "Whew, whew, whew, whew," and he holds an axe up high. Mrs Kelly, our teacher, smiles and tells us the axe is called a tomahawk.

There are new roads around the school. Some of their names are Tecumseh Street, Wyandotte Avenue, Iroquois Crescent. We're told that these names come from the people who lived here before we did. I thought the school and the subdivision were built on old farmers' fields. I say so in class. But Mrs Kelly says these names come from even before that, from a really long time ago.

"I've heard other names like mohawk, comanche and sioux, on old westerns on tv. The movies say these are the names of people who were savage in the olden days, before tv and cars. They are indians. Sometimes a woman who for some reason was tv. The movies say these are the names of people who were savage in the olden days, or soldier. The soldier is from at church about the people who welcomed us from across the ocean from england to this New Land. They taught pilgrims what to eat here, including turkey, potatoes and corn. The people who were here already were indians.

Who were these people who saved then tried to kill, I think. No one tells me.

Sometimes on tv, just before I go to bed, I see glimpses of men in a place called vietnam. The jungle is like my jungle, except in black and white. In bed, the word biafra floats up the stairs, followed by hunger and civil war.

"Sweet dreams," calls mom.

"Sweet dreams, honey," says dad.

MORTMAIN from Deadpan
by Steven Whittaker

...MORTMAIN is the lion's den to which all footsteps lead but from which none emerge...
Geo Simul, Pantomania and Info, Last Threshold Ltd: New Cascadia, 2002

Ocean Weighing
Warfarin's light plane had fallen through all the air when it was slowed with a thud thanks to the water. The plane dived stubborn with minor refraction to the bedrock bottom of the Fucia Simut but Warfarin, who never fancied drowning, pulled out his handgun. He liked loading it with Magnum XTs - Expansion Talons - because they open on contact and drag to the max, hardly slowing. The plane sank unbreached to the bottom and was suddenly under such a mass of ocean his brain would burst he felt. He put the sight of the gun on his front teeth and tongued inside the bore.

"Vivets from his cockpit started to ring! Inwards and we arcs of the bigger ocean peed on him like cupids. This is it, he thought. This is it, said his voice over the water, face tilting in the closing pocket of air. Weighing all the ocean the light plane creaked its surrender. Death thrilled in his brain. This is it, said the trigger to his finger as the ocean took his cockpit.

Lag off, said Warfarin, and the scene was history in iridescent steam. Nice simicide. Nice one, he thought, mulling his amped penultimates and nearly moved by the trigger moment. Maybe even copyright calibre, he thought, whistling into the present.

Warfarin folded his proprioceptive winch which became its own briefcase. For a minute he forgot he was seeing through translucent coins, engineered in nerve enzymes. He squished the neuroceptive pennies, one lidding each eye, off, and watched them wince like oysters in his hand. All the silicon lace, the dendritic yamulka of his Privy VirFur, came off with the eye things and he sat glazed and nodding for a few minutes trying to swallow the yawns of his gnosis. Then he saved the whole lag for later, because you never know.

Parallel Processors
"Come?"
"Yes. You need to ask?"
"Might be faking!" said Facilla
MORTMAIN = Mother Of Real-Time Money-Amping Impish Nodes

"I'm not that good!" said Warfarin. "Anyway, seemed simultaneous for me. How was it for you?" "Yeah, it was simultaneous for me too. Maybe a bit of a lag."

They uncoupled from 69-Squared, or, as Warfarin had pet-named it in his patent, The Bootstrapped Suck. Not all systems can run the position. You need a big augmenter. You need haptic cruncher or forget it.

Facilla disappeared behind a divider. "No rest for the wicked!" she said. Her voice was jazzy and abstracted as she returned to their work console. Facilla is managing the PR (Privy Relations) for the current mutation of Wallfur from yestarday's onus of a pious commons to the more realistic governance of tomorrow's market. (Yesterday is the dark age, tomorrow the light., goes the jingle.)

Thanks to an idea dandled and trawled into relief on MORTMAIN by some temp working at Warfarin's Patent Relations Node, Deadpan may be the first to privatize all
anyone with a nostalgia for words. Warfarin got on the responsive treadmill, it trembled,
and "Exit" said Warfarin abruptly. "Too portentous today, give me something lighter" he
said. "Mmmm, some more recent rube, a sappy song, I want to do a song" and he
headed all-out for a sweat, through the synaesthetic strobing strains of

WALLFUR. Facilla filed through the list of bidders. She used her Software ACID (Appearance of
Conflict of Interest Duper) to plot profit vectors for the Privy Wallfur scheme. She
could hear Warfarin beyond the divider doing his exercises.

IN THE BEGINNING
acclerated to a gauze of suffusion over his face. He broke into a jog through he silicon-

WAS THE WORD AND THE WORD WAS WITH GO...

YESSIRDAY, MY TUMOURS SEEMED SO FAR AWAY
NOW IT LOOKS AS THROUGH THEY'RE HERE TO STAY

KILL IT, AND ANOTHER INSTANT'S ADDED TO THE
HORRIFYING MORTMAIN OF EPEHERMA

E-VOLVO MEATS UP WITH INTERMEDIARY FORM ALL THOSE INCognito EONS

An idea whose time has come, Facilla thinks. Universal competitive Wallfur.
Facilla absorbed herself at her VirFur console. The screen-saver was on and the

WHY SHOULD I BELIEVE IN YESSIRDAY

"Holy shit" he said. "Facilla, you have to see."

Facilla sometimes uses this particular VirFur morfware to help picture, say, the

THE LIGHT HITS THE CURVE

Momma" it croaked.

And... "Exit" said Warfarin abruptly. "Too portentous today, give me something lighter" he
said. "Mmmm, some more recent rube, a sappy song, I want to do a song" and he
headed all-out for a sweat, through the synaesthetic strobing strains of

"And blah blah" said warfarin, ready to enflish his own ideas in litho
prosographics. Instant bust, just add bits.

But first he keyed a transformation between now and long term tomorrow, for
the sum of All money in the world. Even Warfarin likes to rib the system once in a while.

"Momma" the screen said, as he programmed all his privy demurred things to
say, even when the thing in question was the creature of impossible parameters.

This time he was ribbed by the icon he had programmed to shorthand "Nonsense
command. Please re-enter". The icon was a square-root symbol with a small smiley face
inside. It was his icon for so meaning.

"Momma" said the square-root of face.

"Mmm, let's play with tomorrow", Warfarin said and he keyed in the derivative
equation for the relation between the topographies of the baboon and human skull. Then
he subbed the human skull coordinates for those of the baboon, and repeated the
derivative function a few more times to transform the human skull to what would come
at some logarithmic tomorrow in the projected series. E-volvo served up the solicited
form, and it was no thing Warfarin knew.

Its cranium was the monster home of a brain to beware or revere. Which would
have been daunting, except for an inversely proportionate recession in the thing's face,
from the eyeholes down. The cheeks sucked death's lemon, the chin was winced back
into the thorax where it delicately hinged through the thing's exo-thymus and voicebox
and... throat. There was no jawline, just a glotal pink with teeth under the sloping face.

"Momma" it croaked.

Eyeholes were a pixel-whipped stasis between mind dilating' above and face
contracting below.

Warfarin shuddered, or wanted to shudder, or thought of wanting. He guessed he
wanted his body to seize its own equipoise, shudder before any amount of knowing could
ignore it. Too laze.

Save?, said the monitor of his office VirFur.
Warfarin nodded for the scan.

"Check-out this face!" Warfarin yelled across the frescoed office dividers of their
home. "Holy shit" he said. "Facilla, you have to see."

"I'm not very good with faces" said Facilla. "Great with names, lousy with faces."

"You can look later. I filed it under tomorrow" said Warfarin. He lagged onto
MORTMAIN to check on some of us half-life temps. I even watched from inside my
incognito dugout while he read what I was doing on a juicy Patent Relation prospect!

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MULLEIN
by John Barlow

six feet tall, looks just like a person standing there,
Blake spoke to the insane
incorporated their vision into his
just as likely to be true

certainly noticed, it, has connection with trees around its
at the huron television with the moon shooting through like a
cancerous dart or arrow on a computer screen, three chairs can
and cause, thr3liminous
dying planet petals. My father sits in his yard all day and
the night. My father sits in his yard all day and into
are profoundly unforgiven each the other over weeds maybe
discovers things growing. He redesigns the yard around them.

GOD is the outward circumference of Toronto

reason is the outward circumference of energy
Good is the outward circumference of evil

a number of people have said has magic and I've

trees gnats in trees ants dryleaves grass and the sky as a
tunnel coming downward or going out from yourself upward i
believe everything that's been is always here males of unknown
what that says a whole other kind of time this is the lake 200
years ago and this is the lake ten years ago and this is the
lake ten thousand years from now still sees what he saw in
1330 patience isn't necessary I never do get to my point. its
more like a glitch, the silences slide with concentration
across a period of time, the windows on the world light up
from inside, we may be deceived, we may be asleep, we may
be in the world, none of us will (for very long), none of us can
quite be in the world, we can just so faintly be in the world,
the world is frightening toxic flames

trees gnats in trees ants dryleaves grass and the sky as a

the ROMANS used the STALKS AS torches
the ROMANS use the stocks as flame
the Romans used the stalks of mulleins the
Romans used to stocks of slaves

by the end the beginning is crashing over the end
by the end the beginning is beginning in the end
by the end the beginning is many things ending
by the beginning the ending is beginning the end
ALIX’S HOUSE
(for Alix: who lives next door to Yevgeny Yevtushenko)
by Sassaf rass a.k.a. Mark Kerwin
INTRO: This BIG postcard came my way, on a grey and tired FEB. day
It said: "You are invited to taste, something a little better!"
HAI yaah- Enter, a seventy-seven dollar and sixty-nine cent bottle of French wine
Propelling us into the mythical wanderlust void.
I am drinking a museum,
In Jay’s vehicle Bohunk,
A lovely little laughable languid lulu of a serendipity dream.
A torrid, propelled monster, petit ballerina pink glass fairy tale adventure
A lovely little laughable languid lulu of a serendipity dream.

Alix’s house is a hungry dinner bell ringing, a take our order crossing
Alix’s house is a languid, hot and humid and sexy
Alix’s house fulfils, encourages, laughs, seethes, roars, sputters, sneezes, clutters,
Squeeze of lemon in my sweet mouth that
keeps within the wings of a dove.

Alix’s house is a long drawn out child’s grin,
A heart of soul- poetry, knows where I’ve been. Where have I been?
I’ve been to Alix’s house of love...
Love, love, LOVE! Love reunites us, then writes to you
and writes to you
and you, and you too, and
writes to me, writes to write, writes alright, writes right-on
writes rhythm, writes righteousness,
writes you, me
you, me, yomme yomme youme
you and me
US.

Editor’s note: Yevgeny Yevtushenko’s book Don’t Die Before You’re Dead was published recently by Key Porter Books (Toronto).

The Family Firm
by Jill Battson
Mother, read the news to me
as I sip warmed milk
comfort food of my childhood
I am unable to eat a
boiled egg without my parents
should I crack or slice
a chicken’s bloodied mess
congealed yellow on my spoon
battered soldiers stand to attention
did I mention my uncle
sits in the house of lords?
when I was a child star
I tap danced my way
across the airwaves
became a zombie in x-rated b movies
directed by my grandfather
his metal megaphone
boomed in the ears of studio bosses
star material, star material

my image beams through black space
satellite crisscrossed miles
to tease the viewer’s eye
with a pin point of light
complete my face with persistence of vision
on my brother’s television network
he fills the screen
tells the public
watch her, watch her

Father, guide my pen as I write
sweat over a bad novel
too long
time-worn colloquialisms
he runs his fingers along
the spines of self penned books
editions in leather, in french
the spines of self penned books
he runs his fingers along

My mother’s voice sings on CD
valium heavy
slurred her fear
a reminder of drug abuse
the death certificate read
accidental death
congratulations


Editor’s note: Yevgeny Yevtushenko’s book Don’t Die Before You’re Dead was published recently by Key Porter Books (Toronto).
THROUGH THE PORTAL
by Karl Jirgens

We are on a bus near Mexico City. A middle-aged man clams aboard. He is familiar in the way that all men who have gone through his experience are familiar. He is wearing a tan three-piece business suit that must have been expensive in its day, now worn at the elbows and knees and in need of repair around pressure points along the button and pockets. A newspaper clipped open at the classified section is tucked under his elbow. We are approaching the perimeters of the city. I marvel at the idea of 12 million people living in one place. The driver addresses the passengers in Spanish. He bows politely before he begins. "My friends and neighbours, please, I ask your attention for a moment. I apologize for taking your time. Nonetheless, I must tell you this much. For many years, I was a successful business man. I took care of things for a large Mexican corporate. I was promoted and humiliated. I am ashamed that my company has let me down. I am ashamed because I join them; it was relatively easy for us Canadians on tour, but some of the others on the bus looked as though they were also in need. Many wished him well, clapped him on the back. Several grumbled. He exited the front door of the bus with a slow dignity; gratitude and pain showed through his sun-tanned face and his moist unfurled eyes.

There have been over 30 bank robberies in the downtown core of Mexico City during the last month and a half. Along the main drag, the banks all have at least one guard in a bulletproof vest, armed with a twelve-gauge shotgun barrel. Plain clothes security guards with obvious holster bulges at their armpits under their jackets mingle with patrons. In a cantina we chat with the bartender who tells us about the "Perfumados," the new American-trained business class. The middle class here, as in the rest of the world, is being wiped out. Between Margaritas, he tells us that in the past, some bought the idea that social troublemakers were illiterate "Campesinos," laze-abouts who want something for nothing, and who are subject to the influence of outside agitators. But now incomes are so small, the lower class has shifted. Mexican products have been forced off the shelves, displaced by American capital. Medium sized Mexican companies in pharmaceuticals, tires, cleaning products and food have been devastated. Corruption is everywhere, pyramid schemes, "funny money" investments, fortunes lost and stolen. During last year, over 30 new billionaires have been created. The peso loses ground.

In the supermarket a man and woman with two loaded grocery carts of food seize a well-dressed child from among the patrons. The man commandeers the store's P.A. system and demands only that the child's family pay for the groceries. "If you do not pay, then your child will share the fate of my own, and you will not see him again!" The family pays, no charges are laid. We are told that events of this sort are not rare; the tactics of desperation meet the tactics of divide and conquer. In the past, the Campesinos blamed the middle class and saw them as parasites. The middle class blamed the illiterate natives as trouble-makers. Those with darker skins were discriminated against, particularly if their features were too native. During a rally near La Alameda Central, and escaped through a living doorway of police who moved aside long enough to permit us passage. The radio returned to a salsa tune at the bus ground through its gears. That was several months ago. That was another world. Not long after, I was safely back in Canada among the northern pines. Back to cursing the snow, and plugging in the car so that it would start under the navy-blue ice of this northern sky. Not long after, I was back to hot coffee and reading e-mail:

To: kjirg@thunderbird.auc.ca
From: amnesty@newyork.freenet.us
Date: February 10
Subject: Statement on Chiapas <fwd>

Chiapas, Mexico: Amnesty International reports the detention of alleged members of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) on Wednesday February 8, and Mexican President Vicente Fox ordered on February 9 detention order of those accused to be leaders of the EZLN has been followed by alleged Mexican Army incursions into the municipalities of Larrainzar, Simojovel, Morelia and outlying regions. Journalists and human rights observers have been prevented from entering the area or leaving the area. There has been confirmation of reports of aerial strafing against civilian populations in the environs of La Garrucha, the ejido of Morelia and environs of the town of Chamula. There have been reports of torture used to force confessions from alleged members of the EZLN detained by Mexican Federal Judicial Police on Wednesday February 8. Arbitrary detentions have taken place, apparently including those of U.S. citizens Rubeno Cardosa and Roberta Treinian, falsely accused of inciting rebellion. Cardosa and Treinian are in fact free-lance journalists and were in Chiapas when the conflict began anew. They were released shortly afterwards. There are also unconfirmed reports of summary executions, arbitrary detentions, use of torture-killings in the course of operations.

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From: amnesty@newyork.freenet.us
Date: February 10
Subject: Statement on Chiapas <fwd>

Following an armed confrontation between peasants and police in Cacalamaci, A.I. reports that one police officer was killed and one of the peasants was seriously injured. Seven peasants and 13 members of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation apparently have been tortured in police custody. It seems all except one have been transferred to the Reclusorio Norte, a prison in Mexico City. The one that remained was supposedly transferred to the Military Hospital. A delegation of Deputies (Members of Congress) belonging to the opposition Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD) reported that several of the prisoners claimed they were tortured during interrogations in order to force confessions. Most had visible signs of torture. Maria Gomez was reportedly beaten, the life of her two year old son threatened with torture and death unless she signed papers which she was not permitted to read. Hermina Garcia is said to have been stripped and subjected to electric shocks; Rosa Hernando said she was wrapped in a wet sheet and subjected to electric shocks all over her body, then was semi-asphyxiated with plastic bags, submerged at length in water barrels, and some who have been taken for interrogation and not seen since.

To: global@mcluhan.village.edu
From: scrambled
Date: February 11
Subject: Unconfirmed Fighting <fwd>

Saturday Morning: the army and large rancher-hired "guardian blancas" (white guards who are mercenaries, many apparently former CIA), have this weekend been reported killing large numbers, even killing the Zapatistas in their own towns, and subjected to electric shocks all over her body, then was semi-asphyxiated with plastic bags, submerged at length in water barrels, and some who have been taken for interrogation and not seen since.

To: global@mcluhan.village.edu
From: scrambled
Date: Saturday, February 11
Subject: Unconfirmed Fighting <fwd>

We've just received an emergency call from friends in the city of San Cristobal in Chiapas, saying that the hospital in the nearby city of Comitan is flooded with casualties. The city was hit by a severe flood yesterday and the area. The people being attacked appear to be Mayan Indians and poor farmers. They've asked that we try to get word out about this via e-mail. We have no further information beyond this, we ask you to pass this message on, or tell anyone you think relevant via any means so that this does not occur in silence.
To: global@mcluhan.village.edu
From: dfloria@coforel.org
Subject: Chiapas messages.

the inability of national governments to control information terms as you are able to provide, I would like to know more regarding the Chiapas rebellion. Of primary concern to me is the list and what your sources of funding are. I realize that series of reports and perhaps two books on the rebellion, but these are unconfirmed (i.e., classified and not for distribution).

How did you gather your information? If I am mistaken and you are not the source of the Chiapas messages, please let me know, or forward it to whoever is, if you know. Thanks for your assistance.

To: dfloria@coforel.org
From: scrambled
Date: Saturday, February 25
Subject: Chiapas messages

Moon, Global Collectives: We received your post, Mr. Floria. You wonder how we get our information. It is a most unusual mechanism: we exercise our freedom of communication as if it were a human right rather than something given by a "sovereign government." We witness events in our environment, and we talk about them in the belief that the prime engine of "sovereignty" in our flawed world is the coerced silence of people who do not have access to the mechanism of communication, not the raw data of our identities, our sources of information, and our funding. We, too, are curious about our identities - that's a prime reason for discussing these phenomena. If you have the resources to do some research, how curious as to who we are, would you please share it with us? We are our own sources of information, of course, and so we are more limited than you. As to our funding, sir, that ain't none of your damn business, as my hill-william grannappy used to say.

To: dfloria@coforel.org
From: scrambled
Date: Saturday, February 26
Subject: Chiapas subsequent to Moon/Floria exchange: ibid pour moi, and screw you Floria if you think we'll be tracked that easily, you Floria.

In the spring, when Carole and I visited Florida, we decided to go to Orlando to see the popular tourist spots, SeaWorld, the Movie Studios, Disney World. We were only half-interested, but felt we should go see what the fuss is about, what passes for American culture, perhaps catch a glimpse of the engines that drive the U.S. economy. Approaching Disney World is something like approaching a former war zone or some sacred shrine. A secular pilgrimage. You have to do it in stages. For example, you can fly into Florida, but from there you have to rent a car and drive past palm trees, orange groves and pineapple stands. There is no other practical way of getting around. Once inside the mega-aree that is known as Disney World, you have to pay at the main portal, and then you must board a shuttle of some sort which in turn takes you to a mono-rail station. The mono-rail then shuttles people into the heart of the facility. You must pay at the main portal, and then you are free to enter. Inside, there is another trolley-train that runs around the perimeter of the entertainment park, but you must continue on foot if you wish to get to the central area, the heart of the matter. We blended freely, taking photos, buying ice-cream, going on rides, resting, buying cheap souvenirs, colourful hats and sunglasses. Carole is wild about roller-coasters, but I'm not as happy about being turned around every 15 seconds at irregular intervals and at unnatural g-forces. Still, we were on holiday, and I didn't want to argue so I agreed to accompany her on the Space Mountain ride. Again we joined a line-up. There was plenty of time to talk and think while we inched ahead, closer to our goal inside the top of the mountain. Voices kept coming over the intercom system making various announcements in pseudo-Cape Canaveral lingo: "Astronauts are asked to proceed to the launch deck for boarding... Countdown will begin in T-minus 18 minutes..." I talked to Carole about the nuclear missile silos buried deep in the mountains of Colorado, deep within the silos, silent silver phallic awaiting release, metal thunder-birds poised to shoot forth from the darkened caves in great flocks should the moment come. I wondered out loud about the origin of Thunderbirds. Some ancient shamans, perhaps many of them in different places, in different times, received similar visions, perhaps dream visions. "Consider the possibility," I said, "that their visions presaged the advent of jet fighters. Consider the possibility, that what they saw in their visions were metallic jet-engined birds of thunder, with the power to unleash air-to-air, air-to-ground missiles in a business-as-usual fashion from beneath silver wings. Could it be that those ancient visions were of some distant future, were glimpses of our present... Centuries ago, were they looking ahead to see present-day rockets and jets? On this, I am undecided. On this, I think that such an explanation is too comfortably rational, locked as it is within a linear view of time. On the other hand, if time is considered as a field, and not a stream, then there must be more to those visions, something beyond a mere foresight of some futuristic human technology..." The line slowly inched ahead during out conversation.

We agreed that the willingness to look forward was characteristic of Walt Disney, but, although he was a visionary, he was also a businessman, and, he was no shaman. Carole and I talked about Walt Disney locked up somewhere in a cryogenic freeze, not quite dead, nor quite alive, in relatively suspended animation. Some say it is only his head that remains on ice, others claim he rests whole within some high-tech deep-freeze. What thoughts, if any, pass through his frozen mind, what dream or dream-state has he entered? Is it some endless replay of Fantasia, or does he rest in a darkened neutrality, passive, awaiting a measure of time that may seem endless to some but is only a blink of an eye he is awakened to live again. The announcements from Disney World, you have been co-opted, were annoying set against a backdrop of bored parents chiding impatient children, "Look, if you're not going to behave, we can just turn right around, and go back to the parking lot..." "Nooo! I wanna go onna space-ship! mmmwwaaa!! "This is Mission Control, you are now entering the departure lock, only 12 minutes to boarding..." "Mwwaaa!! "If you don't shut up we're leaving Space Mountain this minute! And you get forget about the candy-floss too!" Through the noise, we talked of the little Russian dog, "Laika," the first living thing in space, and I mentioned to Carole that "Laika" in Lavtsian means "time." I explained that the space race and the cold war had been inspired by the Russian Sputnik, which embarrassed the hell out of the Yankees, and so they did what they always did, strew money at the situation. So, finally the Soviets in their cold-war bid, and arrived first on the moon. The whole time we spoke we were inching up a high-tech ramp, the kind of moving sidewalk you get in some of the more modern airports these days. The ramp took us closer and closer to the inside and top of Space Mountain. "This," I said, "this is a cheap facsimile of the ultimate trip, and it's just like America to want to say, 'See, we went to the moon, and now, in our own way, we will take every tourist that wants to go there too.'" And if there was a way to set up a resort in the Sea of Tranquility complete with theme parks, health spas, massage parlours, hot tubs, bars, casinos, fast-food joints and sports, then they would do it. Can you imagine sports on the moon? Near-zero gravity basketball, or World Federation wrestling? They would have to raise the baskets to 50 feet, they'd have to enlarge the arenas by five times the size. Wrestlers could easily toss their opponents out of the ring. Think of Sumo. If they could, they'd do it, but for now, Space Mountain is the closest they can get. 'But the closer we got to the top, the more it seemed like the real thing. The plain of flats were black and white, or sometimes grey. Flashing with a loud pulse, I thought, could smell ozone, and was almost impressed until the announcements changed their tone and ruined the effect, "Mission Control advises that all 'astronauts' must be at least 4 feet tall to participate in the space program..." and, 'Space voyagers we advised that they use the rocket shuttles at their own risk... those with cardiac pacers or weak hearts are advised to avoid this ride, please leave the line immediately...' you are approaching the final entry pod..." People became more frantic, many started to push from behind as we were herded around a curve leading to the "launch pad." Loud hissing noises, and sound-effect tape of rockets blasting off at Canaveral, made the hushed message: "You are entering the lift-off area, please ensure that cigarettes are extinguished... you will be passing into the capsule zone shortly, please remain calm..." Electronic buzzers pierced the air in a regular staccato, the walls were lined with giant video screens displaying billowing blast-offs, on the audio system I heard a scratchy recording of Neil Armstrong's voice, "One small step for man, one giant leap..." attendants moved up and down the lines, urged people to place loose items, hats, pens, sunglasses, cameras inside pockets or under "shirts" to "avoid loss or injury." I felt my heart-beat increasing, lights flashing red, loud buzzing noises made it difficult to speak, "T-minus two minutes to lift-off..." Everything had a sense of trashy immediacy.

This is how I remember it, a gaviting carnival with too many grotesque bodies, candy bars and cigarettes jutting out of lips... large bellies bulging out of shirts... arid humid with sweat and stale cigarette odours, wrappers and butts and undefined sticky substances underfoot. Pop. Coloured lights. Carole holding my arm, laughing and pointing beside me. Too many people with bad-hair days, and stupid
looking T-shirts adorned with idiotically grinning wide-eyed rodents and ducks. Too many bizarre anthropomorphizations. I know Dali worked for Disney, but surely not for this. We are being crushed from behind. The crowd, sensing the approaching goal begins to take on a herd mentality. For a joke, I begin to "moo" out loud. I am having last-minute thoughts of backing out, but can’t quite think of how to manage it, Carole is enjoying the whole thing, laughing it up, suddenly we are in front of a silver metal cylinder, the ordering is purely by mathematical chance, four to a "rocket-shuttle," we ushered toward it single-file, so much for holding hands, I am thrust into the front seat, I hate the front seat, I realize that this may be rougher than I thought, under my shirt, it forms a bulge at my armpit under my jacket, someone clamps a circular metallic restraining device around the back of my neck, I feel strapped, uncomfortable, I look ahead into a pit of darkness, I feel enclosed by a humid tangible darkness surrounding my body, I feel claustrophobic, panicky, I turn with a weak smile to Carole behind me but cannot get a good look before we lunged into the darkness, she is laughing, "isn’t this great!" multi-coloured lights flash around us, I rationalize that we must be very high above the ground, although it is artificial, the "mountain" is quite huge, the "shuttle" lurches forward and we plunge into an intangible darkness, our rate of descent increases, I keep thinking that we should have hit bottom long ago, we keep dropping, something must be wrong, my body is thrown into the sides of the craft, we take a very sudden curve and I suddenly know that if it was not for the restraining bar, I would have fallen out, my neck jers as we come out of the turn, special effects sounds drown out my screaming, we bump and swerve and jerk, head feels like it is plugged into an electric vibrator, in the half-darkness I try to examine the bar, test its locking mechanism with my hands, then I realize this is not a good idea, what if it opens in mid-rise? Red and white and blue lights flash irregularly at my eyes, I feel my retina closing and opening, a huge laser blasts across our path, I have a sick feeling that I might have unwittingly opened the lock on the sides of the metal entity, I feel my stomach as we scream into the darkness, I feel I am about to hit cement face first even though I rationalize that such a thing cannot happen, I feel like I am about to throw up but I can’t realize that I feel the noise that I hear beside my face is my own screaming, I want the ride to be over, I want to get out, we lunch upward, through a loop, my eyes are dazzled by more laser flashes ricocheting around our heads, "Someone really knows their lighting," I think, "it looks like star wars in here..." Laser lights illuminate galaxies, planets, attacking alien space-craft... Carole is laughing hysterically behind me but I am sick to my stomach and can see other rockets thunder past us, the screams of their passengers creating a raucous doppelayer effect as they rapidly approach and recede, amidst "rocket" noises, I sense that we are getting closer to the ground, we veer left, the air feels warmer, drier, the lighting effects seem more distant, but we are still jerking and twisting with sickening irregularity through the flashing dark, I can see the rocket ahead of us passing into the final corridor, it shoots through the centre of a chute lined with a series of donut-shaped candy-coloured lights each triggered to go off the instant the car passes through, the effect is tremendous, a curved rainbow, exploding concentric circles of light, like shooting into interstellar overdrive, I brace myself for the final exit, we are moving around a 180° bank at full tilt, I can feel the ground against my back, not the sides of the metal entity, I feel my stomach as though it is on all sides of the mountain, the light does not sound like part of the special effects, there is a loud electrical "ZAP!" above us, I see sparks falling to the floor from 5 stories up, a humming that I had not noticed up until then stops, the special effects lights stop, our "rocket" coasts to a stop. This is what happened. I am not making this up, we hung there suspended sideways over a black void, I had no idea how far above the ground we might be. A voice came on the P.A.: "This is mission control, there has been a technical irregularity at turn 8, this will be corrected immediately, mission crews report to turn 8 right away. Space voyagers are asked to relax, flight will resume momentarily, mission repairs will be effected as soon as technologically possible." I was amazed at how far they went to maintain the illusion. Even during a breakdown, they never dropped the mask. Lights came up inside. I could see how tacky the space inside the mountain really was. The space was huge, and from the bottom it looked like a great barn that had been passed together out of artificial materials. The outside walls were lined with heavy-gauge chicken wire. Many of the "planets" and "alien craft" were made out of fibreglass. I saw several huge mirrored "disco" balls slowly turning, suspended at various points around the space with laser beams directed at them. The place looked rickety, all strung with wires, and cabl, and the special effects machines took on unexpectedly rocky-dink proportions. The "rockets" were mounted on ordinary roller-coaster track that had ramps running alongside for almost the full length of the ride. A number of blue-uniformed attendants were casually moving about looking for whatever had caused the problem. They all bore the familiar "mouse" logo embroidered over their shirt pockets. At this point, the logo did not inspire confidence in their credibility or predictability for solving technical problems of any magnitude. I noticed that most of them were fumble-faced kids, probably high-school students with summer jobs. Some of the older ones carried walky-talkies. I was getting very uncomfortable sitting sideways in the car. I looked back at Carole but she seemed fine for the time being and was taking in the interior just as I was. I looked down and saw that we were nose over tail, I was above the ground. A little high, above the grassy hill, I had no restraint, then I might be able to slip out and walk the remainder out of there, I didn’t like the idea of just hanging there. The rails might not be built for that sort of stress. The "rocket" was built to go barrelling through the curve with the aid of speed and g-
The crone gazed at her with a clouded eye, and suddenly she clapped her hands. After a long pause, and she spoke again:

"You are a wise traveller. For your wisdom, I do grant a gift that you shall find on a given day while approaching your journey's end."

With those words, the crone hobbled off in the direction that the young woman had come from. And the young woman crossed the bridge but before passing through the portal on the other side, she hesitated and considered returning the way she came if only to walk with the hag for a while. But then, she resolved to continue, and went on her way, and she travelled long and wide and grew wiser still and kept a record of it all in her substantial journal. And one autumn day on a misty pass, several decades later, she came upon a strangely familiar place, and immediately knew it as the Floating Bridge of Dreams. And this time she passed through the northern portal and hurried up to the crest of the bridge where she again found the crone. And as she approached the crone sang and danced. The woman asked the crone a question:

"Old woman, well met after such a long time, why is it that you sing and dance?"

The crone she laughed and shuffled her dance and in a sing-song she replied;

"The gift soon comes that I gave you once, as does the thought that I sent to the morrow, now sharply lass, watch if you can, my enchantment upon the day, to test your journal's power."

And laughing and dancing the old crone's clothing turned into dried leaves, her body melted into the mists, and her song faded on the cool mountain breeze. The woman looked to the bridge stones at her feet and saw only some withered whirling leaves and some grains of dust and sand. And the woman continued her journey and crossed through the southern portal of the Floating Bridge of Dreams and finally turned to home and lived there for twelve years in quiet contentment, socializing sometimes and attending to her garden. And on the thirteenth year with the spring mists rising, she felt an urge to wander and took up some small belongings and a warm cloak she set out and once again landed on the bridge of dreams and walked up to the crest. She looked and waited for a while but could not find the old crone. But presently, from the southern portal a figure did appear. And through the mists that swirled about the bridge, she saw a young woman approach, and with some surprise she heard her own voice speak:

"Daughter of a noble family, I can see you've travelled far. You live in the manner of simple folk, with daily rice and tea. Have you no thought for the morrow, nor enchantment to change the hour? During your travels, tell me girl, what is it you have learned?"

With that, the young traveller put her journal aside, and sipped her tea. Then, she set down her belongings and a warm cloak she set out and once more landed on the bridge of dreams, and walked up to the crest. She looked and waited for a while but could not find the old crone. But presently, from the southern portal a figure did appear. And through the mists that swirled about the bridge, she saw a young woman approach, and with some surprise she heard her own voice speak:

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During your travels, tell me girl, what is it you have learned?"
Today, during breakfast, not long before I came to meet you, I gazed at two pines sitting on my kitchen table. They seemed to be perfectly arranged in the warm sunlight pouring through the window, a hint of shadow here and there, and their delicate needles decorated the ripeness of the flesh and the shrubby bristles of the leaves, and at that moment, they seemed perfect for a painting. Let me tell you this. Let me tell you about this dream. The previous night, I dreamed that I was spirited away on a UFO beyond thought and time. It was an exodus that seemed to be part of a plan that extended back through human pre-history. It was as though, long ago, a selection of people had been placed on this planet, and at a given point in time, some had chosen to be lifted from the earth. I found myself suddenly lifted and pulled through the skylight into the night air. I was in a gondola, the grenades looked like small ripe pineapples, ready for tasting. The city lights stretching serenely to the horizon, it occurred to me that those on the left and those on the right of the ship were both bombing the same target. I began walking the length of the gondola. People were looking at me with expectation, as those on the right of the ship were both bombing the same target I began walking the length of the gondola, the grenades looked like small ripe pineapples, ready for tasting. The city lights stretching serenely to the horizon, it occurred to me that those on the left and those on the right of the ship were both bombing the same target. I began walking the length of the gondola. People were looking at me with expectation, as those on the right of the ship were both bombing the same target I began walking the length of the gondola, the grenades looked like small ripe pineapples, ready for tasting. 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I Heard the Drums by Allen Sapp is a rare collection of historical photos featuring First Nations life intermixed with Sapp's own paintings. Allen Sapp is a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts and has shown his work across Canada, the U.S. and England. His paintings depict pow-wows and celebrations, as well as quieter moments in Cree life centring around the Red Pheasant reserve near North Battleford, Saskatchewan. His style is impressionistic, evocative and sometimes reminiscent of Kurelek's but with a softer edge. Even more remarkable is Sapp's informative essay which discusses his family history, his path in art, and the history of his native community and culture. Stoddart Press, Toronto. ISBN: 0-7737-2974-7. Available through General Distribution: 30 Leesmill Rd. Toronto, Canada M3B 2T6 – (416) 445-3333.

Mel Gusow's Conversations with Stoppard is an excellent collection of interviews that will be of interest to anyone interested in Tom Stoppard as a playwright. The interviews are short or less than one hour long. Some are from Stoppard, and document Stoppard's early stage of his career. Most of these interviews have appeared in publications such as The New York Times, but this collection is self-contained, thoughtfully organized, and includes a helpful afterward, acknowledgment and chronology of plays, as well as a notable introduction. It is clear that Stoppard is at ease with Gusow, and as a result, offers unexpected and revealing perspectives. Grove Press, 841 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10003, USA. Available through General Distribution (see above).

Alden Nowlan's Selected Poems edited with an introduction by Patrick Lane and Lorna Crozier will satisfy both serious Nowlan fans and newcomers to his craft. These poems span much of Nowlan's career, and include writing about his native maritimes, and other places. Nowlan's eye and ear for human achievement and anguish is evident in its depiction of suffering, joy, poverty and courageous spirit. Nowlan died in 1983, and this substantial collection of poetry serves to better situate the legacy of this energetic and insightful author within the larger context of Canadian poetry. House of Anansi Press, Toronto, Canada (416) 445-5967.

Frank Davey's Cultural Mischief is a book of meditations, and seasoned wit, informed by a spirited intellect. Editor of the highly influential Open Letter magazine, and one of Canada's most periscpicuous literary and cultural critics, Davey is uniquely positioned to ruminate upon the sense and absurdity of topics such as multiculturalism, the death of Greg Curnoe, the break-up of Yugoslavia, mischievous underwear statistics, and the narcissism of the publishing trade. Sometimes intimate, sometimes uproarious, this unusual collection of innovative texts blends journalism, documentary and fiction to reveal the subtle and obvious operations to become a woman. The transsexual father becomes the subject of a book by Gaby, the life of a group of attic-dwelling artists and is a masterpiece in its portrayal of the troubled bridges between human endeavour and individual psyche. Cohen's achievement in translating Therese and the Little Hanging Angel, translated by Sheila Fischman are both as excellent as they are essential. These books offer insights into a Quebecois experience by two of Canada's finest Francophone authors. Marie-Clair Blais's American Notebooks: A Writer's Journey (ISBN: 0-88922-358-0), translated by Linda Gabaraiou, and Michel Tremblay's Thérèse and Pierrette and the Little Hanging Angel (0-88922-198-7), translated by Sheila Fischman are both as excellent as they are essential. These books offer insights into a Quebecois experience by two of Canada's finest Francophone authors. Marie-Clair Blais's American Notebooks is an intense and personal document of her development as an author. Astute and poetic, this journal reveals Blais' remarkable talent for observing and recording the micro and macrocosmic in spell binding detail. Michel Tremblay's Thérèse and Pierrette and the Little Hanging Angel is a dramatic journal of personal struggle. This is a lean and intense attack against blind decadence and brutal hypocrisy in economics, religion and sexuality. If Derrida is right, and if every translation is a re-writing, then both Linda Gabaraiou and Sheila Fischman deserve standing ovations for their on-going commitment to excellence. Talonbooks (see above).

Two novels by Monique Proul, Sex of the Stars (ISBN: 1-55054-495-0), and Invisible Man at the Window (ISBN: 1-55054-171-4), recipient of Le Prix Québec-Paris, have both been deftly translated by Matt Cohen, one of Canada's finest short story writers and novelists. Sex of the Stars features Camille Delauriers, a 12 year old girl whose father undergoes a series of operations to become a woman. The transsexual father becomes the subject of a book by Gaby, a blocked writer who seeks a sensational subject. Gutsy and real, this book portrays the told and compassionate with an engaging implacability. The Invisible Man at the Window depicts the life of a group of attic-dwelling artists and is a masterpiece in its portrayal of the troubled bridges between human endeavour and individual psyche. Cohen's achievement in translating both of these works constitutes a significant and engaged contribution to the sharing of cultures.

Douglas & McIntyre, 1615 Venables St. Vancouver, B.C., Canada V5L 2H1.

Don Colles, a Governor General's Award winning poet has translated For the Living and the Dead, a remarkable work by Tomas Transtromer, one of Sweden's most distinguished poets. Brooding and evocative, this bi-lingual edition is an important lyric and imagistic collaboration by two poets of the first rank. Colles' sensitive translation and Transtromer's poetry, provide haunting and beautifully observed views of disease in its performed cultures. BuschekBooks. P.O. Box 74053, 35 Beechwood Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario, K1M 2H9 – ISBN: 0-969999-1-3.